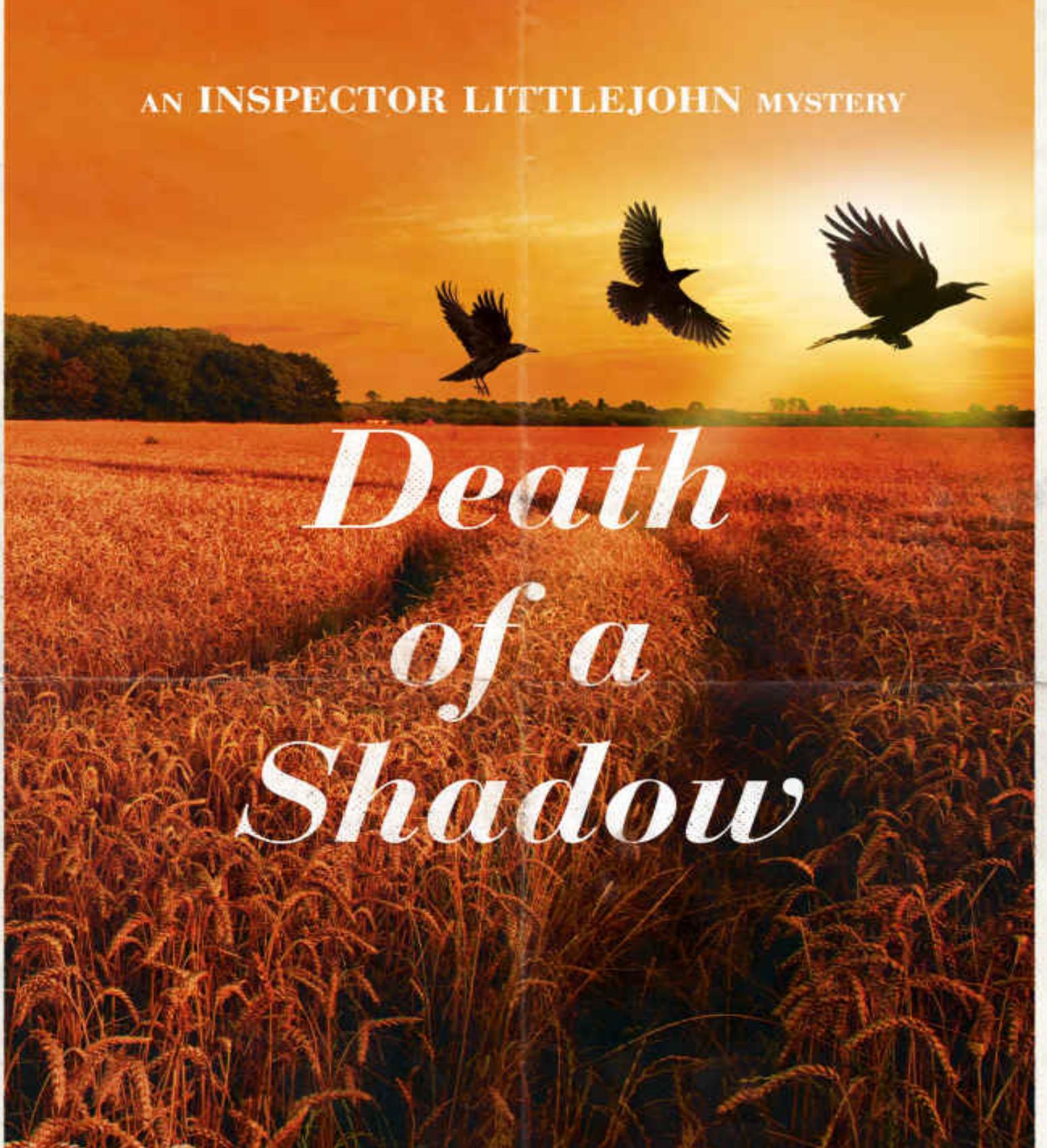


AN INSPECTOR LITTLEJOHN MYSTERY



A photograph of a golden wheat field under a warm, orange sunset. In the upper right corner, three black birds are captured in flight, their wings spread wide against the bright sky. The horizon line is visible in the distance, with a dark, silhouetted treeline on the left.

Death of a Shadow

GEORGE BELLAIRES

‘Pure British detective story’
The New York Times

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Death of a Shadow

by
George Bellairs



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The Unseen Watcher

‘WILL THE owner of car with registration number GE 03567 parked in the English rose garden of the hotel, please remove it to the official car park?’

A quiet, determined, feminine voice came over the hidden loudspeakers in French and then repeated it in precise German and hesitant English.

Littlejohn heard it through a fug of cigar smoke and brandy. Like hearing the telephone in the middle of the night and trying to make out whether or not it’s the alarm clock.

A pause. Everyone in the room looked around to discover if the culprit was there. Nobody reacted to the message and the hum of conversation and the rattle of coffee cups was resumed.

But the loudspeaker wasn’t giving up so easily.

‘Will the owner of car with registration number GE 03567 ...?’

French, German, English, to accommodate the cosmopolitan crowd of guests at the banquet.

Littlejohn took it all in again, but it didn’t register. He was in that state of semi-trance which occurs after a mixture of good food, good wine, pleasant conversation and the babble of voices all around. He was also doing his best to answer questions about Elizabeth I’s secret service, asked by the wife of the police chief of Madrid, whilst her husband tried to justify bullfighting to Mrs. Littlejohn. It was Mrs. Littlejohn who disturbed the conversation.

‘Isn’t that the number of *our* hired car?’

It was. Littlejohn confirmed it by a glance at the old envelope on which he’d recorded it. But he still hesitated. The whole business seemed ridiculous. What was the car doing in the sacred rose garden, of all places? He *had* put it in the official car-park under the palms and facing the lake, a small red *Sublime*, looking like a proletarian intruder wedged between a Rolls and a Cadillac.

‘Will the owner of car ...?’

It was like a third-degree. The loudspeaker was evidently determined to make somebody confess. Littlejohn excused himself to his friends, and rose. All eyes were upon him with complete sympathy, humour, good will, and a certain amount of admiration for his audacity. It was a dinner given to members of the police conference by the Geneva police and it added spice to the event that the English representative should commit a parking offence in the very middle of it. Littlejohn made his way through the crowded room and into the vast main hall of the *Hôtel du Roi*. It was packed with a milling throng. It was late May and although the holiday season had not yet opened, Geneva was overflowing with visitors. Four international conferences were in progress, Disarmament, International Cotton Manufacturers, Moral Improvement and Police. There were also a number of minor jamborees ranging from boy scouts to squabbling potentates from the Middle and Far East and Africa. People of all colours jostled for attention and space. Politicians, financiers, scientists, philosophers and cranks made speeches and attended banquets and parties. There were present at the police dinner fifteen Ministers of State from all over the world, including Sir Ensor Cobb, the British Minister of Security.

Outside, the night was clear and cool. The lights of Geneva and the resorts strewn round the edge of the lake competed with the stars. On the opposite side, at the head of the lake, the celebrated fountain cast up a floodlit jet of water which seemed to vanish in the outer darkness. An illuminated lake steamer waddled its way from Evian loaded with Moral Improvement delegates who had been celebrating there. The smell of the lake met Littlejohn as the revolving doors thrashed him out into the open. It was an all-pervading, nostalgic aroma, dear to all Genevese and other lovers of the city. To Littlejohn, it was a reminder of the damp stone floors of old English country houses.

The little car was right in the middle of the rose garden parked beside a fountain, with four dolphins spouting water at a naked nymph, and guarded by an indignant porter in uniform and gold braid. It looked at the same time, very small, lonely and impudent, the axis around which were incessantly revolving the splendid cars of the wealthy patrons of the hotel. It had been driven into the darkest part of the unlit garden, shaded by trees and flowering shrubs, as though the driver had wished to conceal the intrusion. The loudspeaker system was still in full blast. 'Will the owner of car with registration number GE 03567 ...?'

The porter didn't know Littlejohn but sensed that he was of the police. He was Swiss and trained to tolerate the antics of the eccentric. When he saw the joker was an Englishman his curiosity left him.

'I would have moved it, sir, but it is locked.'

That was all. No reproach, no demand for explanations. There would obviously be some financial recompense for his trouble and solicitude and the man was content to leave it at that.

But how had the thing got there? Locked, and the key in Littlejohn's pocket. Littlejohn unlocked the door with his key.

The first impression he got as he put his head in the car was a faint waft of perfume. It was certainly not that used by his wife. This was more pungent and exotic. Something probably with a name like *Passion*, *Toujours à toi*, or *Amour Furtif*! He switched on the interior light of the car.

Then he saw the bundle in the back. A triangular erection under the car rug. He removed the rug, and there it was. The body of a man, dumped on the back seat in a sitting posture knees up, arms sagging, quite dead. The eyes were wide open and staring, as though death had come upon him suddenly and shockingly.

Littlejohn took a closer look and whistled through his teeth. The dead man was Alec Cling, the detective assigned, for some unknown reason, to protect Sir Ensor Cobb. Sprawling there, drawn up on himself, one hand still extended, as though making an appeal or emphasising a point, Cling still seemed alive. He was a man who had spent the bulk of his official life since the war in following V.I.Ps. all over the earth. He had earned his place not through social graces, but on account of his physical strength, assiduousness and cunning. His technique as an official bodyguard and unseen watcher had been superb. Now, someone more adept than he must have turned up and ended it.

Cling, with the open staring eyes in the back of the small car was not a big man; medium built and slim, in fact. Brown-skinned, hawk-faced, slightly bald, with a large fleshy mouth, and around fifty. He was very neatly dressed, as became his status, and invariably wore a smart slouch hat. The murderer had carefully placed the latter beside him on the seat.

Littlejohn took it all in very quickly. Cling had been killed by a single purposive blow from a blunt instrument on the back of his head before he even knew what had hit him. That was obvious. The blood had coagulated

round the wound and there was none in the car. He had probably been killed elsewhere and dumped.

Littlejohn thought of the plethora of policemen he had left inside the hotel. Many of them very young and full of new ideas, scientific routine, paper work. They thought the old hands at the game, Littlejohn and his contemporaries, were out of date and slow. At a time when some of the advanced moderns were even talking about computers in the detection of crime, the methods of the old brigade were regarded as formless and catch-as-catch-can.

His friend Dorange from Nice was one of the party indoors and he vaguely wished he could have sent in for him, the best collaborator he had ever had and another who was now regarded as a bit *passé*. Instead, Littlejohn behaved like an ordinary citizen and sent the porter to bring a policeman who was patrolling the waterfront. A tall, fair young man, impeccably turned out in the Geneva fashion. He looked inside the car and withdrew, casting upon Littlejohn a reproachful look as though the Superintendent himself had committed the crime and thus disturbed the civilised reputation of the city. Littlejohn made haste to introduce himself. The young man drew himself up and saluted efficiently.

‘Will you, monsieur ...?’

‘I’ll wait here until you report the matter.’

The officer looked hastily in the direction of the hotel, as though wondering whether or not to go there, and erupt into the banquet and announce his alarming news. Then he changed his mind and pointed to a telephone box along the quai.

‘I will telephone headquarters ...’

‘That would be better.’

One could imagine the commotion caused by casting a murder in the midst of the feasting policemen!

Littlejohn stood in the open air waiting for the next move. The lake was silent and still, like the blackcloth of a theatre, with the lights of buildings and the lamps of the promenade reflected in it. Somewhere, in the distance, an orchestra was producing nostalgic music on a battery of violins. On a seat in one corner of the forecourt two lovers obviously locked in each other’s arms.

Then the police arrived. A tall, dark inspector in uniform, with close-clipped hair, two detectives, and an elderly man, evidently a doctor, with a

shriveled skin and a cough which he got off his chest repeatedly without removing his cigarette.

Littlejohn introduced himself to the inspector and gave him the key of the car. They spoke in French.

‘I’ll give you a statement when you’re ready. The dead man in the car is called Cling and is the personal detective of Sir Ensor Cobb, who is, just now, present at the police banquet in the hotel.’

The young inspector was deferential.

‘If you care to wait in the hotel, sir, I’ll meet you in the hall in a few minutes.’

‘That will give me a chance to let Sir Ensor know what has happened and explain my absence to my wife.’

Indoors, the news hadn’t yet leaked out and the banquet was still going on. Sir Ensor was on his feet, reading a speech in halting French. The light from the great chandeliers above him made his bald head glow incandescently.

‘... In these days of scientific progress, of high ideals, of enhanced public welfare, the fate of world civilisation is still in the hands of the police ...’

And he leaned forward and made a gesture like a pat on the back of every policeman present.

In the face of such eloquence and profound sentiments the tragic death of Alec Cling seemed pathetic and small. There, was, however, nothing to be done but to prick the bubble and bring Sir Ensor down to earth. Littlejohn scribbled a note on a leaf of his diary, tore it out, and sent it to the chairman, Dr. Sorgius, an eminent Swiss criminal lawyer, by a *chasseur*.

Dr. Sorgius looked surprised at the interruption and, still under the spell of Cobb’s eloquence, absent-mindedly fished in his pocket and handed the astonished flunkey a two-franc piece for his services. He awoke, however, when he read the note.

Sir Ensor Cobb’s detective, Cling, has just been found murdered outside this hotel.

Dr. Sorgius hesitated. Hoaxes of this kind were becoming a little too frequent and he called back the footman and asked him whence he’d got the message. The man pointed to Littlejohn, now standing at the door awaiting results. Littlejohn nodded in confirmation.

The chairman, known as a man of direct action, at once seized Sir Ensor's coat-tails and dragged him down from his flights of fancy. He then handed Cobb the note.

The effect was remarkable. Sir Ensor was a florid man with a pear-shaped body, long legs and a large bald head fringed by silver hair. He tottered at the news, the blood drained from his features, leaving them pale and lined with purple veins. He seemed suddenly to grow old and afraid. Dr. Sorgius snapped his fingers at the head waiter, who, reading his thoughts, advanced upon Sir Ensor and gave him brandy, which didn't seem to improve his condition at all, for he sank lower in his chair, as though settling himself for a nap.

The guests in the body of the banqueting hall sat, at first, like an audience awaiting the resumption of a film show after a power-cut. They didn't know what had happened. Many of them had seen Littlejohn scribble and hand the note to Dr. Sorgius and the effect it had produced. Some wondered if the British government had fallen; others if some kind of disgrace had fallen upon Sir Ensor.

Dr. Sorgius rose to dispel their curiosity.

'I fear we must now end the proceedings. I regret to inform you that Sir Ensor Cobb has suffered a bereavement ...'

There was a rumble of condolence among the guests.

That was too much for Cobb. He'd never liked Cling, who had been thrust upon him after he had received anonymous telephone calls and letters threatening him with bombs and bullets. He rose unsteadily to his feet, for he'd consumed a goblet full of brandy. He wasn't having anyone thinking Cling was a close relative of his. He held up his hand for silence. You could have heard a pin drop, except that in the kitchens somebody was singing *Capri* in robust *bel canto*.

'I regret that I am unable to finish my speech. My personal detective has been found dead outside this hotel and it would appear to be murder ...'

Almost a dozen reporters rushed out to the nearest telephones, on their ways concocting stories, supplementing from imagination what they hadn't learned in fact. Some of them even approached Cobb for a statement and a television squad with full apparatus glided down upon him for a close-up news conference. Dr. Sorgius chased them all away.

Having delivered his bombshell, the Minister of Security sagged again, seemed to lose all interest in what was going on and was assisted unsteadily

from the room.

It was then that the newspaper correspondents realised that Littlejohn was big news, but they were too late, for the Swiss police arrived and led him away.

The Two Clings

THE DAY after the death of Alec Cling, the police conference was wound up and Littlejohn found himself among the last of the visitors. He had remained behind at the request of the Geneva police but now, it seemed, he had ceased to be of much service and he was packing his bag. His wife had returned to London earlier that day to attend a wedding.

The death of Cling was still baffling the police. With characteristic thoroughness the Geneva force had tackled the case, solved the initial problems of it and then reached a dead end. Chief Inspector Lindemann, in charge, had kept Littlejohn fully informed. They had got on very well together and their collaboration had resulted in a warm friendship.

Littlejohn was quite sure that he had locked the little red *Sublime* car when he had left it in the car park at the *Hôtel du Roi*. How had the murderer opened it, placed the body in it, driven it to the rose garden of the hotel, locked it again, and left it there? This was soon answered.

Enquiries at the car hire depot of Gessler A.G., disclosed that Cling himself had obtained a duplicate car key from them. On the evening of his death, he had appeared and asked for it. The office clerk who dealt with car hire had, at first, resisted such an unusual request. Cling had then told a very good tale. His colleague, Littlejohn, he said, had set out for Montreux in a friend's car to spend the evening there. They had broken down at Vevey. Littlejohn had telephoned to ask Cling to make himself known to Gesslers, obtain a duplicate key for his hired *Sublime* and drive to Vevey to pick him up.

The story, the clerk added, had been a convincing one. Cling had arrived in a hurry. Not only had he stated that Littlejohn was a colleague from Scotland Yard; he had also given proof. Gesslers already had Littlejohn's personal details filed with his application for the hired car. Cling now produced not only his own passport, but his warrant-card from Scotland Yard and his letter of instructions about duties with Sir Ensor Cobb. The

clerk had not hesitated after that. The time of his visit to the garage had been around eight o'clock.

A post-mortem at the medico-legal institute had revealed that Cling had died between nine and ten o'clock in the evening. Littlejohn had parked the car at a quarter to seven. So, Cling had not been long in acting. Nor had the murderer. The report was in no doubt about its being murder. The weapon had been a small fire-extinguisher, part of the equipment of the hired car, discovered under the seat next to that of the driver.

Sir Ensor Cobb had been staying at Ferney-Voltaire, a few miles from Geneva, just over the French frontier. His son-in-law was a consultant surgeon at Gex and did a fair amount of work in Geneva, too. He lived at Ferney for convenience. Sir Ensor made a habit of staying with his daughter whenever he visited Geneva.

Cobb was as baffled as the police by the murder.

'I can't think why such a thing should happen to Cling. The fellow didn't know anybody in Geneva. He was always a bit of a lone wolf and, as far as I can gather, had no contacts whatever there. He wasn't attending the police conference and seemed to spend his offtime sightseeing on his own.'

Asked by Lindemann why Cling had accompanied him, Sir Ensor had been quite candid.

'It was against my wishes. I didn't want a detective breathing down my neck all the time. Although I must say that Cling was a very good man at the job. I hardly knew he was around.'

'But surely you were in no danger, sir. Why did you need a personal bodyguard?'

Sir Ensor looked a bit embarrassed.

'Between you and me, a criminal lunatic had been making threats against me. A little over a year ago, he went bankrupt. He was a Lancashire cotton merchant who attributed his failure to some legislation I'd been seeing through parliament. I was Minister of Industry at the time. He went quite off his head and attacked me. He was treated sympathetically, placed in a home, and escaped. The next thing was a home-made bomb went off at my house. Luckily, the man didn't know much about explosives. The only damage done was that all the glass in the conservatory was shattered. He was arrested, and this time sent to Broadmoor for safety. A fortnight ago, he escaped again and is, as far as I know, still at large. He wrote me a letter, postmarked London, saying that he was still on my track. The Home Office

thought I'd better have someone to keep an eye on me. I resisted the idea until the Prime Minister himself insisted.'

'And Cling was given the job.'

'Yes. For a time after each of the other two incidents, he was assigned to me. We were quite familiar with one another, although I can't say that I liked him.'

'Why?'

'He was a queer sort of chap. He seemed so fanatically dedicated to his job that he couldn't even smile.'

'He stayed at *Mont-Choisi*, in Ferney, with you I gather.'

'Yes. He got on very well with the butler, although he wasn't what you'd call matey.'

So, it would appear, Cling had been lodged in the servants' quarters at *Mont-Choisi*. Hardly fair to a Chief Inspector.

'How long have you been in Switzerland, Sir Ensor?'

'Five days, exactly. We arrived just before the police conference began. Cling accompanied me.'

'I don't suppose he was with you twenty-four hours every day, sir. What did he do in his spare time?'

'I never asked him and he didn't volunteer the information. As for his hours of duty, if you care to call them that, he accompanied me whenever I went to Geneva. We drove there in the car and then he deployed himself. I made it plain from the beginning that I wasn't having him with me shoulder to shoulder, so to speak, and that he could keep an eye on me without breathing down my neck.'

'What about when you kept other engagements, social ones, for example?'

'He went with me but discreetly disappeared, although I'm sure he was watching me from somewhere. A very conscientious man. Once when I told him he needn't follow me everywhere, he politely told me that that was what he was here for and if anything untoward happened to me, he'd feel he'd been lacking in duty. My daughter used to call him the sea-green incorruptible. Once, when I dodged him and went off to Coppet to take a look over the château there, he was furious. You'd have thought he was the master and I was the man. One couldn't help admiring his diligence.'

'So, as far as you were aware, Sir Ensor, Cling had no friends, nor any other associations in Geneva?'

'If he had, he'd have kept it to himself. He never confided in me. Whenever we were left to ourselves – and it wasn't often – we hardly exchanged a dozen words. He was always polite, but completely lacking in conversation. I assumed in the end that he was concentrating on his task of keeping me safe and out of mischief and couldn't persuade himself to relax for a minute.'

This view was borne out by the butler at *Mont-Choisi* when Lindemann interviewed him. A typical *maître d'hôtel* called Pflüger, dressed in dark green uniform on special occasions and in a striped waistcoat with long black sleeves when engaged on more menial tasks, he was middle-aged, dark, and wore his grey hair *en brosse*. He had a narrow, shrewd, clean-shaven face and he didn't seem to care much for Sir Ensor.

'Sir Ensor Cobb treated Mr. Cling like a servant, which was hardly fair. He ought, for example, not to have been lodged in the servants' wing, but that was what Sir Ensor wished. Luckily, Mr. Cling did not seem to mind. He said he'd been used to all kinds of lodgings and this was magnificent compared with some places he'd slept in. We got on very well together.'

'Did you find him talkative and sociable?'

'Yes. When he and Sir Ensor arrived home and Sir Ensor had settled with his family, Mr. Cling would come to my room and drink a glass of brandy and smoke a cigar. He normally smoked a pipe, but told me he was partial to a good cigar and could obtain them cheaply in the village.'

'What did he talk about?'

'He never discussed his duties or Sir Ensor, but he was a very well-read man and could talk on many subjects. He had travelled all over the world and was entertaining in his descriptions of what he had seen.'

A different picture from that given by Sir Ensor.

'Did he tell you anything about his career or his home life in England?'

'In reply to a direct question or two from me, he did. But he didn't say much about it. He had, I understand, been a detective in the Metropolitan police in London until the last war, when he joined the British military intelligence. There, I gathered, he had proved himself so efficient, that when he returned he was given special duties, which included acting as detective to certain politicians and other important people when they travelled abroad or when it was considered that they were threatened with danger of any kind.'

'Did he say he was married?'

‘No. He said he lived alone in a flat in London and was a good housekeeper and cook. He seemed to have no place in his life for women. From which I assumed that at some time or other, his affairs of heart had not gone well.’

‘I suppose he got some time off in the day.’

‘Yes, sometimes arranged, when Sir Ensor stayed resting or entertaining at *Mont-Choisi*. And sometimes, Sir Ensor took off without Cling, which made Cling very annoyed.’

‘How often did that occur?’

‘Several times. Sir Ensor would get up early in the morning and take a long walk, before Cling was dressed and about. And often we would find he’d gone for a walk in the evening on his own, whilst Cling was with me, thinking Sir Ensor was relaxing with his daughter and son-in-law. It wasn’t fair of him to do it. It worried Cling.’

‘And when Cling took, let’s say, an afternoon off, what did he do with his time?’

‘He had been here once before with Sir Ensor Cobb. As you know, the village of Ferney was built by Voltaire, who lived at the château here for many years. Cling seemed to develop a great interest in Voltaire and spent a lot of his free time in enquiring about him in the village and seeking out places associated with Voltaire. Mr. Cling had even read most of Voltaire’s books and letters. He once confided in me that Voltaire’s religious views coincided with his own. From which I also gathered, that, as a Voltairean his political views were not those of Sir Ensor Cobb. However, as I was saying, Mr. Cling pursued his studies about Voltaire in his spare time.’

‘Which took him all over the district?’

‘Yes. For example, I am acquainted with some of the staff at the château, which is, of course, private and occupied regularly by the owners. I was able to obtain permission for Mr. Cling to go over the château, which gratified him very much. He was most enthusiastic about it.’

‘Did Cling speak French, then?’

‘Only a little. Also a little German and he said he could get along with Spanish, too. I speak English myself. I was, in my young days, a waiter at the Savoy in London. I went there to learn the language. We got on very well in the matter of conversation.’

‘Anything else?’

‘Yes. For a man of his sort, he was very fond of children. Dr. Vincent’s three boys were on vacation from school whilst he was here. He played cricket with them frequently. He was a good cricketer. It is not a game I appreciate, but the boys are very keen on it and greatly admired Mr. Cling.’

And that was that. Two different Clings. Laconic, almost sullen, on duty; sociable, talkative and entertaining in his off hours and with his own kind.

Lindemann allowed Littlejohn to read his file on the enquiry and there it all was.

In the midst of his packing, the telephone rang for Littlejohn. It was Lindemann.

‘Could we meet before you go home, Superintendent?’

‘Of course. My plane doesn’t leave until 15.45.’

‘Could we lunch together? I’ll call and pick you up.’

They met at noon and Lindemann drove him to a quiet lakeside hotel at Chambésy where the owner himself cooked excellently and the wine was local and good.

Lindemann was tall, fair, well-built and in his early forties. He looked to have come from the country and told Littlejohn later that his father was a farmer in the hill country behind Morges.

‘If we dine quietly, we won’t be disturbed. This place is really very good. My wife and I often come here in the evenings.’

They ate salmon trout and followed it by a fondue of cheese cooked in white wine.

It was hot and sunny and they enjoyed the view of the lake backed by the panorama of the mountains of Savoy. Nothing was mentioned about Cling and his case until they reached the stage of coffee, kirsch and tobacco. Littlejohn felt he didn’t care if *l’affaire Cling* was forgotten. The good food and wine, the sunshine and the shady garden of the hotel brought back the holiday feeling.

‘You read the Cling file, sir?’

Lindemann, in spite of the current decline in deference to age and experience, regarded Littlejohn as a great detective and treated him with the respect due to a celebrity.

Littlejohn had handed back the file when they met. It now lay on the table beside them, like a shadow across the pleasant afternoon.

‘Yes. What do you think of the case, Lindemann?’

‘We are completely baffled by it. What in English you call a dead end.’

‘You have no theory about what happened?’

‘None whatever.’

The Swiss policeman sipped his liqueur and waited respectfully for Littlejohn to say something.

‘Neither have I. I think that most probably the bulk of the case lies hidden somewhere in England. It will never be solved over here. You agree?’

‘Yes. This is a small country and we of the police reckon we know most of what goes on here. But this affair goes beyond our frontiers. Its roots seem to lie in three countries; Switzerland, France and England. Geneva, Ferney-Voltaire and London.’

‘Agreed.’

‘We know Sir Ensor Cobb very well. Part of his family live in Ferney, which is a suburb of Geneva. His son-in-law is an eminent surgeon, Dr. Vincent, who practises in our city as well as in France. Sir Ensor often visits them. He has been doing so for more than seven years, since the Vincents came to live at *Mont-Choisi* in Ferney. Cling we also knew. Not as well as Sir Ensor, but fairly well enough. It is good for personal detectives of travelling celebrities to keep in touch with the local police. Cling always did that. Nevertheless, I must confess we never enjoyed what I’d call warm personal relations. He was a cold fish.’

‘You knew little of him, then, apart from official contacts?’

‘That is true. As you see from the file, we have some information about how he spent his spare time, when he was not keeping an eye on Sir Ensor. Pflüger, the *maître d’hôtel* at *Mont-Choisi*, found him sociable and talkative, but never very confiding. He was a well-read man, we learned, widely travelled, interested in what he saw whilst abroad. He was also extremely interested in Voltaire. That, in itself, shows rather a shrewd and enquiring mind, especially in an Englishman, if you’ll forgive my saying so.’

‘You have been able to trace most of Cling’s movements since he arrived in Geneva with Sir Ensor Cobb?’

‘Yes. They seem quite innocent. When off duty he behaved like an intelligent and interested tourist. We’ve found no signs that he had any travelling companions. He seemed to enjoy his own company best.’

‘When did Sir Ensor and Cling arrive here?’

‘Six days ago; just before the police conference began.’

‘And I see from your file that Cling’s solitary excursions were in no way suspicious. According to the railway booking office in the *Hôtel du Roi*, where he bought his tickets, he went twice to Annecy, and then once each to Lausanne, Berne, Zermatt and Zürich. In five days he must have had a fair amount of time on his own, as these trips are whole-day ones.’

‘I asked Sir Ensor about that. He told me the conference was a busy one and frequently sat for a full day. On such occasions, our own police were around and he gave Cling the day off. He added that Cling was always reluctant to leave him. He would accompany Sir Ensor to the conference hall in the morning and then, after his return, Cling would call for Sir Ensor in the late afternoon.’

‘Sir Ensor must have used pressure to get rid of Cling on such occasions. Cling wasn’t the type of man to do a job by halves. The idea of leaving his chief unguarded all day whilst he took a trip to Annecy or Zermatt wasn’t the conduct Cling would fancy, I’m sure. Did you ask Sir Ensor if he had insisted on Cling taking days off?’

‘Yes. Sir Ensor said that was so. He’d even had to get annoyed with Cling to make him take any rest at all.’

Their conversation was thereupon interrupted by the arrival of visitors, a male-voice choir from Brig, enjoying an outing and calling for lunch at the restaurant. They seemed so full of song that whilst the tables were being laid, they burst into three sentimental glees, one after the other. It was all very pleasant, but not helpful during a post-mortem examination of Alec Cling. Littlejohn and Lindemann removed themselves to a distance and settled on a seat by the lake in the sun. The background music, which continued, seemed to surround the memory of Cling with an aura of tragic nostalgia.

‘I wonder what Cling was up to with my hired car. He took great risks and trouble to get the key, as though almost desperate to make use of the vehicle. Why?’

‘We can only assume he wanted it either for flight or pursuit.’

‘Unless he thought he’d take a little excursion in it whilst Sir Ensor and I were involved at the banquet. He was perhaps bored. In any case, I can’t help admiring his cheek.’

‘He presumably knew where you’d hired the car and which was yours of those in the car park.’

‘He was a trained observer and, of course, he knew *me*. I can’t say that, although we were in the British police together, we could be described as comrades. But Cling would normally be interested in his own countrymen operating in Geneva. As for the car, he’d instinctively notice the details even if I merely passed him in it somewhere.’

‘So, urgently needing a car, he appropriated yours.’

‘And the reason, I’d guess, probably has its roots in England.’

There was a pause. Lindemann was evidently making up his mind about something and turning over suitable language in which to express it.

‘I agree with you about the root of this affair being in your own country. That is why I would be grateful if you could take a look into Cling’s affairs over there. I have no official status for operating in England. I could ask through official channels for the help of Scotland Yard. But as I know you well and admire your work, if I may say so, I would regard it as an honour and a favour if you would do this.’

‘Unofficially?’

‘Not exactly. I could ask our Ministry to arrange for you to deal with it for us in England. Failing such a step, I’m afraid the affair of Cling will remain unsolved. I wouldn’t like that to happen.’

‘Nor would I. I’ll do what I can. It would be more appropriate if, as you suggest, your authorities made the request officially to Scotland Yard or our Home Office. Will you see to that?’

‘Of course. And thank you. We have already taken the liberty of asking your police if they’d kindly arrange for Cling’s flat to be examined with a view to discovering anything which might help us. They have sealed the flat ...’

Lindemann paused and his fresh countenance grew flushed. Littlejohn laughed. ‘The whole matter was cut and dried before you asked me?’

‘Not exactly, sir. But we have asked for help. They said had we anyone in mind. We replied Superintendent Littlejohn. Of course, had you found yourself unable ...’

‘After a week of such hospitality from the Geneva police ...? I’ll do my best.’

‘And now we must get you to Cointrin for your plane, sir.’

The glee-singers, still exploding with energy, were singing the *Erl King* before they sat down to lunch.

Things Past

I leave devise and bequeath and appoint all my estates ... to my wife Florence Agnes Cling absolutely ...

Cling's flat was almost as neat and orderly as he himself had been and in his desk a card had been placed in a prominent position. *In the event of my death refer to J. Q. Havelock, Solicitor, 2b Tite Street, London, E.C.3.*

Mr. Havelock was well known at Scotland Yard and frequently assisted the staff there in personal matters. Littlejohn rang him up and found him waiting in his old-fashioned office off King William Street. He received a hearty welcome.

Mr. Havelock was the type of family solicitor rare in the City, to whom strange people brought strange troubles. He had plenty of troubles of his own in his time and knew most of life's problems. He had lost one eye in the war and wore a black patch over the socket. His wife had been killed in the bombing of London and his son in North Africa. The partner he trusted had embezzled the funds of the firm and run away with a client's wife. Mr. Havelock, nevertheless, read the lessons in church every Sunday, handled a vast amount of charitable work, and dispensed free legal aid to those who couldn't afford to pay for it.

A little dapper man with a shock of iron grey hair and a pale sardonic face; first impressions of him were very deceptive.

‘Cling? Yes. He left a will with me.’

And Mr. Havelock briefly explained the contents.

Littlejohn told the solicitor about Cling's death and of the many other details he had learned about his life and adventures in Geneva.

‘I thought he was unmarried.’

‘So did many others. His wife left him over twenty years ago. During the war. Cling was then a divisional detective sergeant seconded to Special Branch. He was never at home. In fact, nobody quite knew where he was most of the time. His wife wasn't the type to put up with that state of affairs for long.’

‘What kind of woman was she?’

‘Very poor. He made her acquaintance in a night club. She was then little better than a prostitute but he seemed to become infatuated with her. And he seemed to remain so until the end. At the time he married her, he risked his career, but it didn’t seem to matter. I suppose he thought as others have done before him, that all would be well if he married her and gave her a home. That was just before the war. Then, the war came, Cling vanished about his duties and his wife took up where she had left off. When Cling was due back at the end of the war, Flo ran away with an American soldier and settled down in Chicago. I gather she’s still there and they are living as man and wife and have two children.’

‘And Cling left her all he had in spite of it.’

Outside the second floor window they could see a huge crane hauling girders about on a new building job. Mr. Havelock paused and held his breath as one of the great masses of steel hung shuddering in the air for a minute and then was slowly lowered into place among the rest.

‘Who else could he leave it to? He wasn’t the kind who endowed charities. Furthermore, he was obsessed by the idea that his wife might one day come back to him, or become penniless. He never divorced her and after she left him he kept in constant touch with her movements. He even went to Chicago once to try to persuade her to return to him. Nobody ever knew what kind of a reception he got there. He wasn’t great at confiding. But he never let go. That was one of his characteristics. He never let go in anything. He regarded her as *his*, and insisted on being responsible for her. You might think the whole thing was mad. But that was Cling. Other men have done the same, but you’d never think it of Cling, would you?’

‘I would not. What would have happened if she’d died before the man she’s living with now?’

‘I suppose he’d get the lot of Cling’s legacy that remains. Unless, of course she wills or gives it all away. Knowing her, I’ll bet she goes through it all quickly. I raised the point with Cling when he made his will. He merely shrugged. He wasn’t interested in what happened after his death provided Flo was all right. Very objective, wasn’t it?’

‘How much did he leave?’

‘I haven’t been closely into it. I’d say around ten thousand pounds.’

‘That’s a lot for a man like Cling.’

'He didn't spend much on himself and he had a bit of a flair for speculation on the Stock Exchange. He tucked it all away for Flo, as he used to call her.'

'All this is very surprising. And yet it explains a lot about his standoffish, lonely personality and his way of life. I used to think he was just a crank.'

'He was a crank. He was a conceited man who couldn't bring himself to believe that his wife had left him for good. He had an *idée fixe* that one day she would discover what was best for her and would return to him.'

'And with the exception of Flo, had Cling any other relatives?'

'Two. An old aunt and uncle who, I believe, live at a place called Weston Parva, in Leicestershire. Cling was a native of Leicester. He told me when I drew up his will that if his wife died before him, he'd perhaps make a new will in favour of the old couple, if they were still alive. They are both about eighty. I have their address somewhere.'

'He confided in you very much?'

'Only as far as his will was concerned.'

'I suppose now you'll have to seek out Mrs. Cling in Chicago, or wherever she is.'

'That is so. I've already wired agents there to find if she still exists at the address Cling once gave me. I should be hearing very soon.'

'What was the name of the man she ran off with?'

'Moon. Ulysses Simpson Moon, known by his comrades as Sim Moon. He was an American G.I.'

'I'd imagine that, with a name like Ulysses Simpson. Called after General Grant, I'd think.'

'Obviously.'

They left by taxi for Cling's flat, situated in a mews behind Sloane Square. It lay beyond an archway in a cobble-stoned passage, one of the last not converted by the developers. A living-room, a kitchen, a bedroom, a small bathroom. All neat and tidy as might be expected from their methodical tenant.

There was nothing homely about the place. No pictures or photographs on the walls, no cushions on the chairs, no ornaments. It was almost monastic. Purely a *pied-à-terre* where Cling slept and kept his few things. There were a few books about, the most formidable of which were three heavy volumes of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*. They found nothing of

importance in the wardrobe or drawers of the furniture until they turned to the desk which was locked. J. Q. Havelock had the key which Cling had handed to him, along with the will when it was executed. It all gave one the impression that Cling had had his death urgently in mind and had left his affairs in strict order.

Cling certainly hadn't hoarded things, or else he'd destroyed his hoard in anticipation of the worst. The desk was half empty. All the superfluities of life had been disposed of. A folder containing current bank statements showing very little available ready cash and giving, at a cursory glance, very little evidence of unusual transactions. A clip of receipted bills all for something and nothing, a japanned box with the key still in it, containing birth, marriage and death certificates of Cling and his family. Some cigarettes and book matches. A letter or two of no importance whatever, including one from a plumber about fitting a new geyser and another from a firm of patent medicine dealers giving particulars of inoculation for the common cold.

Little else. Either Cling had severed all ties with ordinary existence and destroyed everything which bound him to it or else had cached away everything of importance—letters, money, private mementoes—somewhere safe from discovery.

Mr. Havelock stood with his hands on his hips and his mouth tight and surveyed the room.

'It looks fine and dandy and ready for a new tenant, doesn't it? You'd think Cling knew he'd never return and put his affairs in good order for the occasion.'

'Who's his landlord J.Q.?'

'A property company in Sloane Square. I gather an elderly lady in the cottage over the way cleaned-up for Cling when he was here. She used to be one of the cooks for the Duke in her younger days and when she retired he gave her the lease of her house until her death. I don't suppose she'll be able to tell us very much, but we can call to see her.'

Across the way they found Mrs. Burdett living in a small house which had once been a coachman's. The present owners of the freehold thought her somewhat of a pain in the neck, for she refused all their offers to find her accommodation elsewhere. They were forced under their agreement to put up with her until she died, when they hoped to develop her house and let it again at a fabulous rent. She said she knew very little about Cling.

She made them tea. A survival of another age, still stiff in tight stays and somewhat of a Stoic. She bore the signs of a well-trained servant and spoke like a good cockney, for she had lived in the Victoria Station district all her life.

‘I only did for Mr. Cling because his place was handy, bein’ just across the way, and the money was a help. I saw very little of him. Most times he’d gone when I went over in the mornings. For weeks at a time I’d never set eyes on him, although he’d be livin’ in the place, if you could call it livin’. Out early and back late.’

‘Did he ever bring anyone home or have any visitors?’

‘In all the seven years that Mr. Cling has been here, I never saw anybody either visit or call on him. Of course, in the way of his duties, he’d sometimes be away for weeks on end. He always paid me as though he’d been livin’ there, even when he wasn’t at home.’

A huge black cat rose from the fireside and jumped on Littlejohn’s knees. This seemed greatly to please Mrs. Burdett.

‘He doesn’t take to everybody.’

‘Did anybody come around enquiring for Mr. Cling or leave anything for him?’

She thought for a moment.

‘Not that I remember. If anybody wanted Mr. Cling and he wasn’t about, they weren’t likely to enquire here. They’d call at the *Pelican*, which is to the right through the archway. You could ask there.’

J. Q. Havelock excused himself.

‘Mind if I leave you to it, Littlejohn? I haven’t time to continue this investigation, much as I’d like to. I’ve a full book of appointments today.’

It was their slack time at the *Pelican*. An old-fashioned pub, still retaining a lot of brass and mirrors, soon to disappear with developments of the property. Its clientele came mostly in the evenings. The landlord was youngish; thin, sallow, with a smear of dark moustache across his upper lip. Another good-humoured and polite cockney.

Littlejohn asked for a pint of ale in a tankard.

‘Cling? The police chap from the news. Yes; I recollect him. Now and then he’d call here for a pint, which he drank without a word. I saw in the papers that he’d been found murdered somewhere abroad. World’s in a sorry state isn’t it?’

He contemplated his beer, for which Littlejohn had paid, as though wondering whether or not to weep in it.

‘Did you ever have any callers enquiring about him?’

‘You’re from the police, too, aren’t you? You’re on the case, eh?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, I’m sorry I can’t help. I don’t remember anybody ... Here; wait a minute. Yes. Just after we took over here, a little less than a year since, I remember it, because I’d never heard of Cling at the time and I asked a couple of the locals as were in and they gave the fellow his address in the mews there.’

‘Was it a man seeking information about Cling?’

‘Yes. He didn’t get much, because nobody knew anything about Cling except that he was in the police. We just gave the chap his address and he went off there. He didn’t have any luck though. He drank three doubles before he left and another couple when he called back. He said he’d found Cling was out and it didn’t really matter.’

‘What kind of a man was he? English?’

‘Oh, yes. London, I’d say. Medium built, rather thickset, and I think he had a moustache. Gift of the gab and a big thirst. Pleasant bloke. Too pleasant, really.’

‘Is that all?’

‘You did say you were from the police?’

‘Yes. My name’s Littlejohn.’

‘Not *the* Littlejohn? Wait a minute. I’ll just get the wife. She’ll be interested in this.’

He hurried to the back quarters and returned shepherding a buxom woman with red cheeks, which, by comparison, made his own look even more deathly. She was carrying a flourishing child in her arms with cheeks as ruddy as her own. She said she was pleased to meet Littlejohn and, judging from the joyful noises he made, so was the child.

Mr. Cuthbert Ingram, the licensee according to the notice above the door, explained the purpose of Littlejohn’s visit to his wife, who then shifted the child from the crook of one arm to that of the other, as though somehow it stimulated her thoughts.

‘The man with the warts!’

Mr. Ingram made noises of approval.

‘Fancy you, remembering that, Polly. You remarked on it at the time, didn’t you? Only we decided in the end that they were moles, not warts.’

‘Warts or moles, when I came in the bar and saw them, it gave me quite a turn. He had three big ones on his face. Bigger than peas they were. I was carrying Walter at the time ...’

She gave the smiling child a shake to indicate his identity and he chuckled his approval.

‘... and, as you know, blemishes of that kind are not good for women in such condition and might cause birthmarks on the baby.’

Littlejohn didn’t know, but he let it pass.

‘It doesn’t seem to have affected him, does it? He looks very well.’

Mr. Ingram filled up Littlejohn’s tankard in a gush of appreciation.

Mrs. Ingram hadn’t finished.

‘You remember, Bert, I called your attention to the moles at the time. I also said that if you were made as ugly by moles I’d see that you had them removed ...’

She turned confidentially to Littlejohn.

‘The surgeons do wonderful things nowadays, don’t they? My sister-in-law actually had a new nose put on by them. Said her own was too hooked and pestered her husband till he agreed to have it made what they called retroussey. Not that it made much difference, I must say, but that wasn’t the doctor’s fault ... You were saying sir ...?’

‘Three moles. Where were they situated?’

‘One right in the corner of his nose ... Here ...’

The right side.

‘... and two on his cheek ... Here ...’

The left temple.

‘And that’s as far as I care to discuss them, because we’re expecting our second around Christmas and I’m sure it isn’t good to talk of such things in my condition.’

The child was growing restive through being thrust from one arm to the other so often, so Mrs. Ingram left to appease him after elevating him in the air for Littlejohn to kiss him.

‘I do hope the next is born on Christmas Day,’ said Mr. Ingram, wistfully watching their departure. ‘A proper birthday, wot?’

Littlejohn left him proudly contemplating the happy event.

Back at Scotland Yard, he put in an enquiry about the identity of the strange visitor at the *Pelican* ... warts and all.

Surviving Relatives

‘OF COURSE it would be a pleasure to help Scotland Yard, but you know as well as I do that my sort of work’s very confidential ...’

The man sitting behind the cheap desk smiled insolently at Cromwell. He had bloodshot eyes and there was a reek of whisky around him. He had three unsightly moles on his face, as described by Mrs. Ingram.

It was Inspector Cromwell who had identified him from the description.

‘That sounds like Jim Cupples ...’

And Cromwell had climbed four flights of stairs in a seedy building in the Temple, shortly to be replaced by a massive concrete block, to ask Cupples what he knew about Cling.

Cupples had once been a member of the Metropolitan police, but his drinking habits had cut short his career and he had started in business on his own.

James F. Cupples, Enquiry Agent.

It was stencilled on the ground-glass panel of his shabby office door. His business was mainly concerned with adultery and divorce. He also operated at the London end of American enquiries put in his way by a former colleague who, like himself, had left the police before he was thrown out, and was established in New York.

Cromwell came straight to the point, as usual, and asked Cupples what he knew about Alec Cling.

‘... You know very well, Bob, the lines on which private enquiries are run.’

The familiarity only stiffened Cromwell’s approach.

‘This is murder, not squinting through keyholes at adultery. Cling’s dead. So there’s no further reason for withholding information. You may turn out to be a principal witness in this case. So I think you’d better co-operate. Better quietly, just between the pair of us, than going to Scotland Yard with the Press all around.’

‘You needn’t use threats, Bob. You know if one of the papers got a picture of me going into Scotland Yard, it would be the end of my business. But don’t push me too hard.’

Cupples had narrow little eyes and they grew greedy. He was trying to think up some bargain or other to his advantage. He couldn’t very well ask for cash, but there might be some other form of *quid pro quo*.

‘There’ve been expenses in connection with my enquiries and now that Cling’s dead, I’ll be left out of pocket.’

‘Sorry, we don’t buy information.’

‘Sez you!’

‘We don’t buy information. You’ll have the comfort of helping to further the ends of justice.’

‘It’s my profession and I get paid for it.’

‘Who were you working for?’

‘All right. But if I help you, you’ll have to help me if I need any assistance in my job in the future. Fair’s fair ...’

‘I don’t have to do anything. Who was it?’

‘As you know I have international connections ...’

He looked as if he had, too. Underworld ones.

‘... This was from the American end.’

‘What did they ask you to do?’

‘Find out where Cling was living, what he was doing, and whether or not he’d married again.’

‘Why were they enquiring?’

‘That was confidential business. It wouldn’t be right ...’

‘Don’t be coy, Cupples. Cling’s dead. Murdered. Any information which might set us on the track of his killer? If so, out with it and stop beating about the bush.’

‘I’ll be candid with you. I’m anxious to help if only you’ll stop bein’ so official and behave like an old colleague. I was going to say that my New York contact told me what it was about. It seems that Ulysses S. Moon, the American with whom Cling’s wife ran away after the war, had just died. They’d actually been married when they got back to America, although the marriage wasn’t valid, because she never got a divorce from Cling. It seems that after they got to Chicago, Moon prospered. He ran a little chain of drug stores. When he died, he left all he had to Flo Cling, as his wife. They had children, but Moon also had three brothers, who consulted a lawyer with the

view to seeing if they could upset Moon's will. That's where I came in. They wanted to know, as I said, if Cling was alive and whether or not he'd married again.'

'And that was all?'

'The lot. Except that I had an enquiry from the same source about a year ago. They just wanted Cling's address then.'

'You reported back accordingly.'

'Yes.'

'And in the course of your investigations, did you come across any information which would be useful to us now?'

'Such as?'

'Oh, come now, Cupples. You've been in the police yourself. What sort of information do you think we're after?'

'I'll tell you one thing; Cling was a lone wolf. I went to his place near Sloane Square. It was locked-up and nobody seemed to know a thing about him. I was a bit stumped. So I had to ask some of my old friends at the Yard who knew him and I got the information about Cling from them. One of them told me, too, that Cling had only one surviving relative. A Mrs. Seal, who lives at a little godforsaken village in Leicestershire. Weston Parva. I went to see her to confirm things. Hell of a job getting there. And a hell of a reception I got, when I did get there. It's an old Georgian house, tumbledown outside and in. She has a couple of savage dogs and half a dozen cats and to add to the confusion there's a half-mad chap who looks like an artist living there, too. I don't know whether he's supposed to be a manservant or a relative. He's called Coop, and every time the old woman wanted anything she yelled for him. Coop! Coop! What with the dogs barking, the cats jumpin' on my knees and clawin' my trousers into holes, Mrs. Seal yellin' Coop! and Coop runnin' in and out, I thought I was in a madhouse. I always thought Cling was a bit queer. That explained it. He comes from a mad family, I'm sure.'

Cupples's eyes popped from his head as he lived through it again and his feelings eventually called for a drink.

'Drink, Bob? No? Mind if I do?'

He took whisky, neat and liberally, from a bottle in a drawer and drew in a hard breath.

'That's better. Where was I? Oh, yes. In between Coop running in and out, I managed to ask about Cling. She almost went off the deep-end when I

mentioned Flo, his runaway wife. She seemed fond of Cling. After she'd blown off steam about Flo, she confirmed that Cling had never divorced her or married again. Then, she talked a lot about Cling. He must have spun her a yarn or two when he visited her. She thought he was head of Scotland Yard. And of the secret service, as well. I didn't correct her, because she had a habit of raving when anything was mentioned that she didn't like. I was no wiser when I left than when I'd arrived, except that she'd confirmed that Cling hadn't divorced Flo or married again ...'

He paused for effect. Then he added very cautiously and confidentially:

'There's one thing, I remember, however, which might interest you, Bob. There was a big fireplace in the room and a large mantelpiece above it. It was littered with old Christmas cards and things and standing in a row upright against the wall at the back, a long string of postcards. About a dozen of them. They were all views of the same place. Geneva. And all from Cling. The old woman left the room to shout for Coop at the bottom of the stairs and I just casually gave the line of cards the once-over. Some of them were postmarked this year, some last year, others the year before. They all had the same message on them. *Weather fine and warm. Regards. Alec.* The sun must always be shining in Geneva. Funny he should finally get himself murdered there. I wonder how the old woman's taken it.'

Cupples's tale was at an end. He sat there, obviously now growing anxious to see the last of Cromwell and take another helping from the bottle. Cromwell scrambled from the ramshackle client's chair and thanked Cupples.

'Don't mention it, old man. Always glad to help old pals.'

'There's one thing which might help you, too, Cupples. Cling's lawyer was Jethro Havelock. You remember him? King William Street. If I were you, I'd have a word with J. Q. Havelock. He might be able to give you some more information about Cling and Flo.'

'Thanks Bob. Appreciate that. And now, I must be stirring myself, too. Got an appointment.'

Probably in the pub round the corner.

Weston Parva was ten miles from Leicester on the southern side and had once been an isolated little gem of a village. Old church with three bells, houses of the vicar and the squire on each side of it, and the remaining few farms and cottages in the parish occupied by yeomen and workers on the

land. Then the long tentacle of city development had reached it and filled it with houses, shops, commuters and a factory.

Mrs. Virginia Seal occupied a smallholding a mile from the village. She waged constant war against local authorities, resisting roads, the compulsory purchase of land, the erection of telegraph poles and electricity pylons, the local assessors of rates and taxes, and the various nuisances committed by neighbours. She was standing at her front door when Cromwell opened the garden gate and she at once set the dogs on him.

The creatures were both muzzled. One was an Alsatian and the other a shaggy fox terrier. Their attack was by weight alone, for they could neither bark nor bite, and they launched themselves growling and choking, at Cromwell's legs and the seat of his trousers. He retreated behind the gate and closed it between himself and his adversaries.

'I'm from Scotland Yard about the death of Mr. Alec Cling,' he shouted.

'Why didn't you say so? I thought you were selling something.'

The woman then turned towards the inside of the house and shouted.

'Coop!'

A tall, thin figure with a white shock of hair, in flannels and sweater materialised. The woman gestured that he could attend to the dogs and he manoeuvred them into a wooden shed, shut the door, and left them making muffled protests.

The woman then indicated that the coast was clear and Cromwell approached again. Whereat a large tomcat emerged from the house, raised its back and its fur, and spat and swore at him.

'Come in. He won't do you any harm.'

As Cromwell avoided the spitting cat, it made a pass at his trouser-bottoms and tore out a clawful of threads.

There were more cats indoors, but feminine this time and less bellicose. The living-room was filled to suffocation with good antique furniture. On the walls, some good pictures, interspersed with family portraits. Cromwell recognised a framed enlargement of Cling himself, informally dressed in white shirt and shorts, sitting in a boat with oars shipped on what looked like a lake. It might have been Geneva.

Before he could introduce himself, Mrs. Seal asked what he wanted. He gave her his card instead of reciting his credentials.

'You were a friend of Alec's?'

He nodded. It was rather an exaggeration. Cling never made friends among his colleagues.

‘You’re a bit different from the man from Scotland Yard who called here before. He was a disgrace to the name and I soon showed him the door. I didn’t tell Alec about him when last I wrote to him. I thought it might upset him. Sit down.’

She indicated an arm-chair and he took it. Almost right away a little white cat sprang on his knee, kneaded his lap with ecstatic claws, and settled down. He bore it all in the line of duty.

‘What’s your business? Is it about Alec’s death?’

She had been putting on a bold defensive front. Now she broke down and wept. She did it all silently. Large tears down her lined cheeks and anguished pumping motions with her chest.

She was dumpy and stout and seemed the type who might be fond of chocolates and iced cakes. She looked to be in the region of seventy, her features were chubby, and her grey hair was cut short, with a fringe in front. She wore round, pink-framed spectacles and the grey eyes behind them were expressionless.

‘I’m sorry. I called to ask if we could do anything and also to ask if you could help us to find who ...’

‘Murdered him?’

‘Yes.’

She composed herself and to take her mind off her troubles, she began to abuse her previous visitor.

‘He said his name was Cupples. I’m sure they wouldn’t have a name like that at Scotland Yard. It must have been a false one.’

As if the name of Cling was much better!

‘He was half drunk when he arrived and reeked of whisky. He said he was a friend of Alec’s who had asked him to be sure to call on me when he was in the Leicester neighbourhood. Was he on the staff of Scotland Yard?’

‘No. He used to be a constable in the Metropolitan police and left to become a private enquiry agent.’

‘I thought there was something strange about him. So did my brother, who is very shrewd. Cupples was a vulgar fellow. He asked too many questions and I’m sure had I left him alone, he would have searched the drawers. He got no answers from me and I soon sent him packing.’

The little cat on Cromwell's knees turned over on her back and stretched out a beseeching paw for caresses.

'Alec was my only surviving relative, with the exception of my brother, whom you saw when you were at the gate. Cooper Cling. Called Coop for short.'

Suddenly remembering his existence, Mrs. Seal summoned him.

'Coop!'

The shock of white hair and the childish, pink, deadpan face, with its weak chin and large nose, appeared round the door. Cromwell suspected that Coop was, mentally, not quite all there, in spite of the boasted shrewdness.

'My brother, Mr. Cooper Cling. Inspector Cromwell, of Scotland Yard.'

She introduced them formally. Coop was a shy man and the mention of an official title seemed to increase this. He said in a hesitant voice that he was pleased to meet Cromwell. Then he made an excuse.

'The dogs,' he whispered and left them.

Mrs. Seal had accepted Cromwell and liked him. She asked if he would take a glass of something and he agreed.

'Coop!'

Coop must have been used to the routine. He arrived carrying a bottle and three small Venetian wine glasses which must have been worth a lot. He poured three helpings, drank his own right away and in one, and again made his exit, well satisfied.

The drink was home-made sloe gin, very tasty and very potent. Cromwell felt it warm his innards and then go straight to his head. It must have been maturing for years.

Mrs. Seal thought his caution was disapproval.

'Drink up. Don't you like it?'

'It is a very fine liqueur, Mrs. Seal.'

'Well, get it down and have some more.'

She smiled and he knew he had gone up in her estimation.

She filled his glass again.

'I gave the vicar a bottle once. He must have thought it innocuous and drank a considerable amount before evening service. They had to send hastily to Leicester for a replacement to take evensong. What do you wish to know?'

She took another sip.

‘I’m sorry, but I’m sure I can’t help you much. With the exception of visits on my birthday in June and on Boxing Day, Alec never came here. He was a very busy man. A high-up at Scotland Yard and the Home Office. He must have had a lot to do and fearful responsibility.’

Perhaps Cling, too, used to drink his aunt’s sloe gin and under its benign influence, embroider his job a bit. At any rate, Cromwell saw no reason for telling her the truth that Cling had been a Chief Inspector assigned to shadowing celebrities.

‘Yes. His duties kept him occupied most of his time. He was rarely at home. Rarely in England, for that matter.’

‘He spent a lot of his time abroad, I know. Conferences and such like. He told me and sent me postcards from abroad whenever he was there. Quite a lot in a year’s time, too.’

The postcards Cupples had spoken of had been removed from the mantelpiece, perhaps because they reminded Mrs. Seal too much of Cling now.

‘He died in Geneva.’

‘So I was officially informed. He went there quite a lot. Conferences, as I said. I know he loved Geneva very much. In fact, he jestingly spoke of retiring there. He sent cards at least four separate times from there last year.’

‘All from the city itself?’

‘Yes. I’ll show them to you.’

She opened a drawer in the dresser and took out a large stock of them secured in a thick rubber band. She handed the bundle to Cromwell. There were dozens of them. Probably all the cards Cling had ever sent her. Cromwell briefly thumbed his way through. Mexico, Tokyo, New York, Chicago ... All over the place. But the most had come from Switzerland, mainly Geneva. All bearing the same greeting, the one Cupples had reported. At the bottom of the pack was a photograph; the only personal one there. It looked like a newspaper photographer’s effort and showed Cling mounting the steps to a large BEA plane at London Airport. It was a good likeness.

‘He travelled with a lot of very important people, didn’t he?’

She sounded very proud of Cling. Perhaps he kept in touch with her and visited her because only with her could he really relax and be himself, cease

from playing a part. The only woman he trusted, who wouldn't let him down.

The card had a pencil note on the back.

Best wishes. Going to Geneva. July, 1962.

Mrs. Seal was pointing to the figure standing two steps higher on the stairs than Cling.

'That was a member of the Cabinet at the time. He still is and I believe it's said that one day might become Prime Minister ...'

It was Sir Ensor Cobb, then plain Mister.

'Might I borrow this, Mrs. Seal?'

'Of course. But please let me have it back, won't you?'

'I will.'

She poured out some more of the sloe gin.

More Family Matters

CROMWELL and Mrs. Seal continued talking through the long, sunny afternoon. Now and then, Coop summoned by the usual clamour, put in his head and performed some service or other for his sister, and then disappeared. The white cat slept on Cromwell's knees. He had drunk four glasses of the sloe gin and felt like sleeping himself.

Most of the talk was about Cling. There seemed to have been a great bond of affection between him and his aunt. His parents had died when he was at school and she had brought him up. He had lived at Weston with her for many years.

'He always wanted to be a doctor. I couldn't afford to send him to the university. Seal, my husband, died early in our married life. He rented a farm at Braunstone and left me only just enough to live on. Coop had a small annuity and we managed together. In those days there were few facilities for free education at universities. Alec just had to get over his idea of taking medicine. But he wasn't interested in any other career. He joined the police for lack of something better.'

Cling, in spite of her inability to help him fully in his career, had obviously been the apple of his aunt's eye. After her first bitter outburst of tears, however, she shed no more. Her emotion was manifest in a deep hatred for whoever had murdered Cling.

'I don't know who did it or what was the motive. But I want him—or her—caught and hanged.'

She raised her voice wildly for the first time. The cries she raised for Coop didn't count of course.

'Alec was ambitious. In later life when he visited me, he talked of his colleagues and the people for whom he worked. He had grown to fancy the easy gracious ways with which his work brought him into contact and he could indulge his fancies because he was, at last, earning a lot of money.'

Cromwell didn't know exactly how much, but he had a good idea! It certainly wasn't enough to permit any fancy living or over-indulgence.

Cling must have had some other source of income if he lived, on the quiet, the life of those V.I.P.s whose safety was in his hands.

‘... He received rapid promotion in the police force, as you doubtless know, Inspector. During the war, he did distinguished work in the secret service. It stood him in good stead afterwards and gave him the contacts and influence to get on. He ended in a high place in the Home Office, you know.’

‘Did he talk much about his duties when he visited you, Mrs. Seal?’

‘He gave away no secrets, of course. He was a very discreet man. But he told me about his work in a general way. He told me about his promotion and how much trust the high officers reposed in him. He was very good to me and Coop when he grew able to afford it. He gave me considerable capital sums to avoid our having to sell or mortgage this place. Thanks to his liberality we can now end our days in moderate comfort.’

Perhaps a good mark for the enigmatic and self-contained Cling. Or, on the other hand, he might have flashed his money about in front of his relatives to show how clever he was. Wherever and however the extra income was made, he’d shared it with his aunt and uncle. But where had it come from?

‘When did you last see your nephew, Mrs. Seal?’

‘Last Boxing Day. As I told you, he invariably spent an hour or two with us then, every year.’

‘Did he say anything about the work he was doing then or expecting to do?’

‘Not specifically. He said he would shortly be going abroad again. He mentioned Geneva. Of course, he often went there. It is the world centre for conferences, isn’t it?’

‘Yes. Did you ever meet his wife?’

Mrs. Seal’s hands tightened on the arms of her chair until her knuckles grew white and she showed signs of sulky anger.

‘The least said the better about that unhappy event.’

‘I agree with you. But I did think that maybe there might be some connection between that part of his life and his death. It is rather a stupid idea, but ...’

‘It is not stupid at all. It was sordid and wicked and, although it seems remote, some connection of the kind you mention would be quite in keeping.’

‘Did you ever meet Mrs. Cling?’

‘No. Alec wrote to me after he’d married the woman. He told me nothing about her. I wrote back and reproached him with not letting us know before the event and invited him to bring her to meet us. He never did. He came himself not long afterwards, but made excuses for her. He said she’d been on the stage and that he’d met her in the course of his duties ...’

Ingenious of Cling! She’d been a dancer in a night club, a well-known prostitute, and Cling had been with the police when the club was raided.

‘... He seemed very fond of her, but somehow, he wasn’t like the old Alec. Irritable and preoccupied. I expect he knew what was coming; the war. Moving in the government circles as he did, he must have known. His marriage ended with the war. I believe she left him for another man. I always thought she wasn’t his sort. The stage unsettles one’s life. Even from the small amount of amateur theatricals I indulged in before my marriage I learned that. I am glad that he didn’t divorce her and free her for other misadventures. He was a man of principle, at least, in the matter of divorce.’

‘She’s still alive, I believe. She lives in America ...’

‘I don’t care to hear anything more about her, Inspector. Unless, of course, she proves to be connected with Alec’s untimely death. In which case, I shall be extremely interested.’

For the time being, Cromwell was sure he’d better not mention the contents of Cling’s will. From all appearances, the fat would probably be in the fire if Mrs. Seal learned that the nephew she thought so well-off had left all he had to the woman who’d run away with another man.

‘Did your nephew leave a will, Mrs. Seal?’

She seemed surprised. As though to mention such things was really in bad taste.

‘Not to my knowledge. But then, I’m not surprised he never mentioned it to me. He always kept his private affairs to himself and strictly apart from his family and social relations. Why do you ask?’

‘It is just one of those routine questions one asks on a murder case. You see, money and the directions it goes in are often motives for crime.’

‘I’m sure they are. Coop reads quite a lot of detective stories and when we’re by the fireside in the evenings, repeats them to me from beginning to end. So I know quite a lot about crime and detection ...’

Cromwell smiled and mentally summed it up. Adult education in crime!

‘You don’t know where your nephew kept his papers and, if he’d made one, his will?’

‘I don’t. Why do you keep insisting on his will? He may not have made one.’

‘I will tell you in confidence, Mrs. Seal, that his colleagues went to his flat near Sloane Square after hearing of his murder and looked it over with a view to finding out if there were any clues there which might help ...’

Best not mention J. Q. Havelock and the will in his hands. Havelock himself could deal with that later, if necessary.

‘They found nothing at all. No letters, documents, records, diaries. No will ... Nothing. Alec seems to have lived a secret kind of life in which he was determined nobody should share.’

She didn’t seem surprised.

‘Wouldn’t you say the very nature of his confidential work for the government led to such an existence? He was in the secret service at one period, and at the time of his death, he was engaged on special work. It was natural that he wouldn’t set down in writing how he spent his time and what he was engaged in. Anybody who broke in the flat would find such documents and perhaps make use of them in a sinister way.’

Cromwell felt like asking if she and Coop also discussed spy cases and the fiction which covered their activities, far into the night.

‘I quite see that. But it makes it very awkward for everyone when a man dies and there’s no indication of his wishes post-mortem.’

That was a good one! Wishes post-mortem. Cromwell could see that Mrs. Seal was impressed by it, too. She’d probably come out with it again later that night to Coop. She sat back in her chair, thinking. Then:

‘I think I might have an explanation for none of Alec’s papers being available. Very interesting.’

She leaned forward confidentially and her eyes sparkled.

‘It’s like a detective story. One day, after I’d mentioned spies and their activities and the complications of diplomatic and other work, Alec opened up a little, as I’d intended he should do. We got talking about Hitler and his abominable associates and all the evil they’d done. I said that if they hadn’t been watched, they’d have got away with it and fled somewhere far off and lived on their ill-gotten gains. In fact, I was sure that certain of Hitler’s

underlings had succeeded in doing so. The conversation turned on how such gains could be hidden ...'

She sat back smiling, waiting for Cromwell to answer the conundrum.

'And he told you?'

'Not exactly. But he mentioned that it was possible, in certain countries, neutral during the war, to open banking accounts and safe deposit facilities in anonymous names. I think he said they were opened by numbers, numbers only known to the bank and the individual concerned, or perhaps one or two more people whom he trusted.'

'I've heard of that. Did he say he'd done that himself?'

'Not in so many words, but when he smiled a queer smile and added "you can, for example, do it with certain Swiss banks", I got a sort of intuition that he'd done it himself in view of his love of Switzerland and his connections there. I told you before that he sent me innumerable postcards from Geneva and that, I believe, is one of their great international banking centres. I must say that where intuition is concerned, I'm very good. I get a *feeling* about certain things which invariably proves right. I even got a *feeling* on the day he died that something was wrong about Alec ...'

Cromwell almost asked her if she'd had a *feeling* about who did it!

'I see. That might be useful, Mrs. Seal. We'd better follow that matter up.'

'Let me know if I'm right, won't you?'

'I certainly will.'

Cromwell didn't quite know when to terminate the interview. Most of the vital information he was gleaning about Cling just seemed to slip out casually after patient waiting. He wondered if Coop had any *feelings* about the affair.

'Do you think I ought to have a chat with Mr. Coop, too?'

She looked uneasy.

'I think not. Poor Coop's memory isn't as good as it was. He's terribly woolly. He'd probably tell you a lot of nonsense. All mixed up, you know.'

As though aware that he was being discussed, Coop suddenly arrived. He was carrying a silver tea tray elegantly set out with tea for three. He daintily poured out and passed it round and then handed out the plate of scones.

'Coop made these himself. He is an excellent cook. In fact, it's his hobby.'

Coop showed no signs of gratification at the compliment, but went on slowly masticating one of his own productions. He was sitting opposite Cromwell, who had a chance to look him over quietly. Coop had a fine head and the aquiline features and long nose with narrow nostrils of his nephew Alec. He looked as if he might, at one time, have been a man of parts, accomplished in many ways. Perhaps until the unremitting attention demanded by his sister had swamped him, taken his time and energies and reduced him to the state of a servant.

Coop ate his scone and passed the plate around again. He was a good pastry cook, if nothing else, thought Cromwell.

‘Have you both spent a profitable afternoon together? I assume you have mainly been talking of Alec ...’

It was as though an obedient and silent pet dog had suddenly begun to articulate. Even his sister seemed surprised.

‘Yes. We’ve had a very interesting conversation, Coop. Inspector Cromwell was a friend of Alec’s and ...’

The swamping process was beginning again, but this time Coop would have none of it. It was evidently his turn to do some talking.

‘I was very fond of Alec, probably because he was the only member of the next generation of Clings and was always so kind and considerate to us. He was very much attached to the dogs, too. And they to him. All the cats and dogs will miss him. Now that he is dead without children, the name will, alas, die out ...’

Mrs. Seal made tutting noises and looked annoyed at Coop for suddenly taking the limelight from her and confusing her with the domestic animals.

‘I don’t think Inspector Cromwell will be very interested in our family tree, Coop ...’

Coop raised his long, thin hand.

‘Please don’t interrupt. I was simply saying that although I was very fond of Alec, he and I never got really close. You have said the same yourself. No, no, let me go on. It’s only fair that the Inspector should have my opinion as well. After all, I am upset by Alec’s death, too, and wish to add my comments to what has been said. I repeat that neither you nor I ever knew anything about Alec, the life he led, or the risks he ran. I can quite understand his fondness for Geneva. It was the only one of his enthusiasms which he ever aired when he was with us here. He was so keen on the place, you will remember, that he fired us with a desire to see it, too. You recollect

how, in 1962, Mr. Putt and I spent a week there. Mr. Putt was our next-door neighbour, Inspector. I used to play chess with him. He died last year ...'

Mrs. Seal showed signs of impatience.

'My dear Coop, for goodness' sake don't start telling the Inspector of your adventures in Geneva, or he'll be here all night. They will be of no help to him in the matter of Alec's death ...'

'I must insist. How can you or I judge what will be of importance to Inspector Cromwell? As you know very well, in these matters, a little thing, apparently irrelevant, may give the key to the whole mystery ...'

Cromwell thought he'd better intervene to prevent a distressing family row.

'Of course, sir, I'd be interested to hear your account of your trip, if you can spare the time. I presume Alec invited you and arranged it all.'

'Of course he didn't. Coop and Mr. Putt took a sudden fancy for going there. Alec didn't want them and tried to discourage them. Neither of them had been abroad since before the war and a couple of old men of seventy wandering about the Continent on their own was ridiculous.'

'We enjoyed ourselves, I assure you. But let me go on. We stayed at a very nice hotel in the city. Alec had shown no enthusiasm about our going there, so we chose our own lodgings. We didn't even know where Alec stayed when he was there, but I felt I'd like to know. Then my sister and I could imagine what it was like when we thought of him there. Mr. Putt, before he retired, had been a member of the consular service, so we went to the British Consul in Geneva to enquire about Alec. They seemed a little surprised but received us very kindly. I must say they were a bit reticent and cautious about giving the information until I'd proved my relationship and Mr. Putt had told them of the days when he'd served in Hamburg, Bone and Barcelona. Then they gave us Alec's last address. He had recently been in Geneva at a conference, but had then returned. We went to see what kind of a place he stayed at.'

'Really, Coop. I'm sure your inquisitive wanderings are of no interest to ...'

'On the contrary, Mrs. Seal. Please go on, sir.'

Coop gave Cromwell a grateful bow. Then to reward him, he went to a drawer in the sideboard and produced a box of questionable-looking cigars. As Cromwell lit one, it crackled with dryness and he almost set himself on fire.

‘Swiss,’ said Coop. ‘Alec gave them to me last Christmas. To resume. We were surprised when we found the place. And yet, as I told Putt, we ought not to have been. If Alec was working for the secret service, it would hardly have done for him to parade himself about at an expensive public hotel. He had rented a room in a rather poor quarter near the university. I remembered the address quite well. *13bis*, Rue Jacobi. The concierge wasn’t a very nice person. We couldn’t, of course, see the room, but it just gave me the idea of where Alec lived. We didn’t tell Alec I’d been there. You see, he’d not liked the idea of my going to Geneva at my age, and I didn’t wish to annoy him. That was all I had to say. I hope it will be useful. And also that, in my opinion, Alec probably met his death in the course of his duties in the secret service. These men, like Alec, carry their lives in their hands, I know. And now, I must not neglect my routine chores ...’

He carefully gathered the tea things and, without any help from his sister, stacked them on his tray and took them and himself off.

At the Ministry

SIR ENSOR COBB'S room at the Ministry of Security was very comfortable and furnished in impeccable taste. He'd seen to that himself when he took over and cleared the place of all its old accoutrements and started afresh. He received Littlejohn from behind a large, genuine Sheraton desk, his own property which had moved in with him.

He was a tall man of between fifty and sixty, bald, dark, florid, well tailored, almost a dandy. He was a widower who enjoyed life. He had been an ironmaster in a large way in a family company and had left it with a considerable fortune when he entered politics. His fine war record in Military Intelligence had marked him down for the Ministry of Security when the time came.

Littlejohn had called reluctantly. He avoided politics whenever he could and feared that the case of Alec Cling was going to lead him in that direction.

‘Take a seat, Littlejohn.’

The two men faced each other with the great desk between. Outside, although they could not see it, Big Ben was striking eleven.

A woman of about forty entered with a silver tray holding coffee cups and jugs. She was small and dainty with fair greying hair and finely chiselled features. She had a serene and efficient way with her. She smiled at Sir Ensor as she placed the coffee cups on the table.

‘Well, Kate?’

‘Well, Sir Ensor.’

There was a friendly intimacy in the way they greeted one another.

‘Black, sir?’

The steady grey eyes smiled at Littlejohn this time. He felt somehow that his presence there was approved.

‘Yes, please.’

She poured the coffee and left them through a door behind Cobb's chair.

‘Kate has been with me for more than twenty years. When she was sixteen, she joined my company and when I left business for politics, she came with me. A Sheffield girl. She accompanies me everywhere.’

‘You are from Sheffield, too, Sir Ensor?’

‘Yes. Our firm has been established there for over a century and a half. My home is still near Sheffield when I find time to return to it. My constituency is on the doorstep, as well. If ever my constituents feel they need a change, I guess Kate and I will find ourselves back with the old firm asking for jobs. You come from the north, too?’

‘Originally, yes, sir. Near Ulverston ...’

‘Very nice ...’

Each instinctively knew that the other had informed himself about his life and record from various detailed reference departments and they were now indulging in cheerful manoeuvres. Like two chess-players opening a game, testing each other’s strength and style. It was all very friendly. They talked easily, man to man, each aware of the other’s skill and reputation in his own field and respecting him for it.

‘Cigarette?’

‘I’d prefer my pipe, sir.’

‘Light it, then. I prefer a pipe, too, when I’m relaxed enough to fill it properly.’

Cobb’s secretary entered and quietly removed the coffee tray.

‘There’s a manservant here who’s supposed to be my personal attendant but Kate – Miss Halston – insists on serving the drinks herself, as she’s always done ...’

A pause.

‘Well, Littlejohn. What do you want of me?’

‘It’s about Cling, of course. Can you tell me anything about him, sir? The Swiss police gave me their files to read, but I’d rather tackle this affair in my own way.’

‘Are you in charge of the case?’

‘Not exactly. I’m seconded to help the Swiss police. It seems there might be more English than Swiss background to it all.’

‘There isn’t much I can say about Cling. You’d think that one’s bodyguard, one’s shadow, would soon become familiar and everyday. Not so with Cling. On his personal affairs, he was as close as a clam. Travelling with him, sometimes, over long distances, I’d try to draw him out. But it

was never much use. He was always very civil, but extremely skilled in changing the subject. All the details I've learned of Cling's biography are from the records.'

'How often has Cling accompanied you on your travels, sir?'

'About half a dozen times. Three times to Switzerland and to Mexico, Italy, and Yugoslavia. I don't usually travel with a detective. I avoid it whenever I can. As you know, however, there have been bomb scares and threats against the lives of ministers which have caused a temporary flutter and a tightening of personal security arrangements. I intended to go without a guard to Geneva this time, but someone sent a letter to me saying that a scheme to eliminate me was afoot. I can't think why. My trip was harmless enough. But the Prime Minister insisted on my travelling with a detective and, as Cling seemed to have taken possession of me on such occasions, he came with me.'

'The letter you mention, sir. Do you have it in your possession?'

'I'm sorry I haven't. Cling asked for it. Said he might be able to find out who had sent it. He didn't return it and, with his death, I'd forgotten all about it. You may find it among his papers.'

'That's another puzzle. We can't find any of his papers. There aren't any in his flat. He must have found a good hiding place for them.'

'He wasn't married, I gather.'

'His wife left him years ago. He ran a mews flat off Sloane Square, but we found it totally uninformative. It was just like an hotel bedroom which someone has vacated and left behind no trace of his stay there. Cling, as a detective, must have known the kind of things we'd look for in a case such as this. He seems to have made a point of eliminating everything which might give us any help. In which case, it would appear that there was some dangerous secret in his life which he didn't wish to come to light even after his death.'

'In such a case, I'd be the last man to whom Cling would even give a hint of it. He did his job of taking care of me excellently. Except when we were travelling together or lodged in the same hotel, he was like the invisible man. I knew he was there, but rarely caught sight of him.'

'I believe he was well-read and well-informed. The Swiss police talked with Pflüger, the butler at *Mont-Choisi* who, during Cling's stay there with you, got on very well with him. Cling was a bit more forthcoming than usual, although quite on his guard as well.'

‘Yes. I heard from Pflüger about all that. A funny thing, but Cling specially asked to lodge in the servants’ quarters of *Mont-Choisi*. He said he’d be more comfortable and less trouble there.’

Pflüger had blamed that arrangement on Sir Ensor. But then it might have been Cling’s way of avoiding awkward questions. For some reason, he wished to be on his own as much as possible. This might have been a means of being sure of it.

‘I take it that Cling got time off when you were occupied with your family at *Mont-Choisi*, sir.’

‘That’s right. As I told you, I didn’t regard the threats as very serious. I felt I could look after myself quite well. However, to put the Prime Minister’s mind at rest, I agreed to take Cling. It was a kind of token agreement and I didn’t keep Cling’s nose to the grindstone. He often went off on excursions of his own when he felt I was in safe hands. He was a great traveller and very interested in what he encountered on his way.’

‘I gather that Cling was exceptionally fond of Geneva. In the course of time, he showered his sole surviving relatives, an aunt and uncle in Leicestershire, with picture postcards of the place.’

‘I didn’t know that. He had, as I said, been to Geneva with me before, but I’d no idea that he was so keen on the place. It might be that his frequent visits there had something to do with his death. I wouldn’t know. I’ve never had a hint of any dangerous enterprises of Cling there. In any event, he’d have kept it all to himself. He was that way. One strange thing I do recollect, however. My grandsons at Ferney were very fond of him. He used to play cricket with them.’

‘Could it have been that the writer of the threatening letter to you might have actually been in Geneva and encountered Cling?’

‘The letter proved not to have come from the man I thought had sent it. Since I returned, I’ve learned he was at that time back in a mental home and couldn’t have had access to a typewriter or the post. Cling might have found a clue from the letter, however, and in pursuing it met his death. Perhaps he deposited it somewhere with his papers.’

‘That may be so. We may come across it. The main thing now is to find the cache, if any, where he kept his documents and the like.’

‘Have you any ideas about his hiding place?’

‘His aunt, whom one of my colleagues visited yesterday, said she got the idea that Cling had an account with a Swiss bank in Geneva. She even

suggested he might be known there by number instead of name, after the style of a foreign dictator, stowing away a fortune on the sly for the day when they kicked him out.'

'Did she say which bank?'

'No. It was only a theory. She reads a lot of crime and secret service tales.'

'I suppose you'll be investigating that.'

'The Swiss police will do so. I've informed them.'

Littlejohn thought it time to assume the offensive again. After all, he was there to question Sir Ensor, not to give an account of his own investigations.

'During your time together in Geneva recently, sir, did you gather any impression that Cling was being watched or felt himself in danger?'

'None whatever. Cling, as I said before, was completely unemotional. On the surface, I mean. What his feelings underneath might have been he never gave one the slightest hint. Even if he knew someone were looking at him through the sights of a rifle, I'm sure he wouldn't change countenance.'

'I believe Cling was particularly keen on Voltaire and spent quite a lot of time investigating the locality of Ferney.'

Sir Ensor looked irritated.

'I must confess I'm not in the least interested in the fellow myself. My daughter's house at Ferney isn't far from Voltaire's old home. The village still finds Voltaire a small gold-mine in the holiday season. Quite a lot of Americans visit the place and spend their money there. For myself, I've never been to the château where Voltaire lived ... What could Voltaire possibly have to do with the murder of Cling?'

'None, as far as I can see, Sir Ensor.'

There was a knock on the door and a newcomer thrust his head round it and then withdrew.

'Don't go. Come in.'

The intruder was tall and fair with a long inquisitive nose. He was formally dressed in a black jacket and striped trousers and Littlejohn felt sure he wore a bowler hat out of doors. Littlejohn had seen him somewhere before, perhaps in the news, certainly not in the rogues' gallery.

'This is Roland Bellin, my private secretary and man-of-affairs ... Superintendent Littlejohn, of Scotland Yard, in charge of the Cling case over here.'

Bellin shook hands. Or rather proffered a limp dry hand to be shaken. Littlejohn knew now where he'd seen him. Television.

'We were just discussing the strange secretiveness of Cling, Roland. He seems to have died after cleaning-up his affairs. The police can't find any papers ... By the way, Littlejohn, did Cling leave a will?'

'Yes. It's in the hands of a city lawyer, J. Q. Havelock, who also seems to have Cling's investments – scrip certificates and the like – in his possession. It all gives the impression that Cling expected sudden death at some time or another.'

'You mean Cling had stacked away his personal papers in some secret hideout or other?'

Bellin, who had a languid look about him, suddenly seemed to wake up.

'That's right.'

'Any idea where?'

'I was just telling Sir Ensor there'd been a suggestion that he'd deposited them for safe custody in a Swiss bank.'

'Why Swiss?'

'The Swiss banks seem to afford such facilities in an anonymous way. The depositor can use a number instead of a name.'

'I know that. But why Switzerland?'

'Cling was very fond of Switzerland. Especially the Geneva neighbourhood. He spent a number of holidays there.'

'I see. I wonder if he became involved in some shady work or other and met his death in consequence.'

It sounded like Mrs. Seal, with her spy mentality.

Bellin was looking questioningly at Littlejohn, as though expecting him to agree.

'I really couldn't say, Mr. Bellin. Did you know Cling yourself?'

'Yes. I've accompanied Sir Ensor on one or two missions and Cling has been there. I was in Geneva at the time of his murder. I was present at the police dinner when it occurred.'

'You also stayed at *Mont-Choisi*?'

Bellin gave Sir Ensor a wry smile.

'We could hardly expect Mrs. Vincent to take us all under her wing. No. Sir Ensor and Cling were at *Mont-Choisi* and Miss Halston and I had rooms at the Beau Rivage.'

‘It was your duty to brief Cling concerning Sir Ensor’s daily programme?’

‘Miss Halston did that. She is Sir Ensor’s personal secretary.’

There was a note of reproof in the answer.

‘Might we have another word with Miss Halston, Sir Ensor?’

‘Of course.’

Cobb flipped a key in the instrument on his desk.

‘Can you come in for a moment, Kate?’

‘Yes, sir.’

She entered and looked questioningly at the three men at the desk.

‘The Superintendent has something to ask you ...’

‘I believe it was your duty to brief Cling about Sir Ensor’s daily programme when you were away.’

‘That is right.’

‘Do you remember the routine for the days of Cling’s death?’

She answered at once with no show of thinking out what it might have been.

‘The conference resumed at ten o’clock at the Palais des Nations. Cling was told to accompany Sir Ensor there from Ferney for the opening. I met them at five minutes to ten. Security was laid on by the Swiss police at the conference hall and, once indoors, Cling was free to do as he liked most of the day. The concourse adjourned for lunch at the Palais. Cling, therefore, was free until five and didn’t return to Sir Ensor at lunch time. Work ended there at five. Sir Ensor was then joined by Cling and they returned to Ferney. Sir Ensor dressed and left at six-thirty. Cling accompanied Sir Ensor to the *Hôtel du Roi* for the police dinner. The Swiss police resumed security responsibility there, Cling left, and that was the last we saw of him.’

‘And this schedule, I assume, was strictly adhered to.’

‘The evening before, I had given Sir Ensor and Cling a card each with the day’s routine typed on it ...’

She recited it all pleasantly, without hesitation, as though it were tape-recorded in her mind.

Sir Ensor smiled.

‘It was also Miss Halston’s custom the morning after, to ask if all went as arranged. In spite of the upset caused by Cling’s murder, she posed the usual question. I was able to say that the schedule had gone off like

clockwork and we hadn't deviated. That is, of course, until Cling was murdered.'

'What did Cling do with himself whilst you were in the conference, Sir Ensor?'

'I really don't know. Bellin was with me most of the time and Miss Halston was at her post in the secretariat in the Palais, I assume ...'

'That is right, sir.'

'So nobody quite knows where Cling was or what he was doing. He left you in the hall of the *Hôtel du Roi*, sir?'

'Yes. And went out through the main door after promising to return at ten-thirty to wait for me. I had decided not to stay very late, although such dinners go on for hours and hours. We'd rather a fatiguing day and I wanted to get back to *Mont-Choisi* and enjoy a quiet hour with my daughter and her family before retiring ...'

He turned to Miss Halston.

'I think that will be all, Kate, unless Superintendent Littlejohn has any more questions.'

'No sir. Thank you, Miss Halston.'

She left them, turning on her way to straighten the papers and odds and ends on Sir Ensor's desk.

'You won't forget the Cabinet at two-thirty, Sir Ensor?'

'No Kate. I think I'll have a snack at my desk.'

'Smoked trout, chicken sandwiches, a sorbet, and some of the Crépy to drink ...?'

'Fine.'

A snack! To Littlejohn it sounded like a banquet, but in keeping with Sir Ensor's reputation for fastidious living.

'Anything more, Littlejohn?'

'I think not, Sir Ensor. It's good of you to spare me the time.'

'Not at all. Anything more you'd like to ask Bellin?'

Bellin looked like a respectful counter-jumper, but Littlejohn had an idea that behind it all lay a keen brain and a shrewd judgement. He remembered the thrust and parry of certain television interviews in which Bellin had proved himself a very competent duellist and diplomat.

'I wonder what Mr. Bellin thinks about all this, sir.'

Bellin jerked his head sharply back as though surprised at the sound of his own name.

‘Eh?’

‘I wonder what you think about the Cling affair. Did he seem the sort, in your experience of him, who might get involved in matters leading to murder?’

‘In my brief dealings with him I formed no conclusions whatever. He always struck me as a cold fish, devoted to his task, deadpan of face, sparing in speech. He always seemed to look on me as of no account. He had Sir Ensor under his wing whenever we met and I got the idea that the murder or kidnapping of an odd secretary or two was, to Cling, a matter of no importance.’

‘And that was all.’

‘Yes. Except that I could never get rid of the idea that perhaps the phlegmatic mask and almost mechanical efficiency of the man might hide something really tremendous going on underneath. In other words, that in different circumstances and in other places, Cling might be a changed man. He might be leading a double life. He might have got in mischief when he was off duty.’

13bis Rue Jacobi

WHEN Littlejohn boarded the plane at Heathrow it was raining. A fine drizzle, which hampered flying and made schedules uncertain. They got away an hour late.

Over France the weather changed and by the time the Swiss mountains appeared, the sun was shining. They turned along the lake to land at Geneva with Mont Blanc on the left etched two dimensionally against a clear blue sky.

The airport was bathed in sunshine and people moved around in summer clothing. Lindemann met him, clicked his heels and shook hands. They had already arranged the meeting by telephone. A general conference about how the case was progressing.

Littlejohn followed his colleague across the hot tarmac. No passports, no customs examination. Everyone saluted Lindemann and he saluted solemnly back. It took Littlejohn all his time to keep up with the brisk Swiss officer. They climbed in the official car and Littlejohn mopped his forehead. There crept upon him once more the holiday feeling from which he always suffered when he visited the Continent in good weather. The very idea of work was a bore.

All the awnings, green, blue, orange and red were out at the houses between Cointrin Airport and the city. People in beach wear and light clothes were sipping apéritifs on the café terraces. Littlejohn was sorry when they reached the police station and settled down to routine again.

There was very little to report at the Geneva end. The English one was very little better, either. Cling's body had been released for burial and J. Q. Havelock had been in person to Geneva – quick in and quick out – to attend the cremation and the despatch of the ashes to England. This was an event Littlejohn had heard very little about. Havelock was a swift and quiet worker. Lindemann told him that Cling's ashes were to be interred at Weston Parva.

Otherwise there was little fresh. Few avenues of enquiry had opened and such as had appeared had proved to be dead ends.

They lunched at the *Perle du Lac* on the lakeside and ate *Coq du pays au champagne* with a local sparkling wine. It was only after coffee and kirsch had been served that Cling was mentioned again.

‘Do you know Rue Jacobi, Lindemann?’

‘A street in the Eaux-Vives quarter. It mainly contains small hotels and furnished apartments.’

‘It seems Cling was very fond of Geneva and spent a lot of his spare time here. He stayed at 13bis Rue Jacobi, according to his uncle, who once visited the place.’

‘With Cling?’

‘No. Only on the sly. The uncle was afraid the secretive Cling would be annoyed if he found he were being spied upon.’

‘We’d better call there on our way back. It’s not a very savoury quarter, although Cling might have found cheap and decent lodgings there.’

They left the restaurant, followed the lakeside across the Pont du Mont-Blanc and then took off in the direction of Eaux-Vives station. In the maze of streets behind a local market they found Rue Jacobi. Junk shops, wine warehouses, and, where the street approached the main thoroughfare to the station, a number of plain hotels with nothing but doorways and small name-plates to advertise them. There was one of these at No. 13, and 13bis was a door leading to furnished apartments and registered as an *hôtel meublée*.

The sight of Lindemann’s uniform brought out the concierge right away. She occupied a gloomy bed-sitting-room almost behind the door. A small peevish-faced woman dressed in black who had been peeling potatoes and was now busy drying her hands and arms on her apron. She waded into the attack right away.

‘You’ve come to the wrong place. There’s nothing to concern the police here.’

‘Do you know a man called Cling? C-L-I-N-G ... An Englishman.’

‘No. Never heard of him. The only English tenant we have is a man called Smith and he hasn’t been in his rooms for a week.’

A man called Smith. That sounded hopeful. Littlejohn took out the photograph Cromwell had borrowed from Mrs. Seal, showing Cling boarding a plane.

‘Is that the man?’

‘That’s him! What’s the matter? Have they found his body in the lake?’

‘No. We just wish to ask him a few questions. Please show us his room.’

‘But his name is Smith.’

‘We’ll settle that later.’

‘The room’s on the second floor. He hasn’t been here for a week and when he comes back I’ve something to say to him. The way he left his room was a disgrace. I let myself in to see all was well and the place looked as if he’d gone crazy in it. Things thrown all over the shop, drawers turned out, bed ripped open. He must have lost something and gone mad because he couldn’t find it.’

‘Has it occurred to you that his room might have been burgled?’

‘Of course not. All my tenants are respectable and no outsiders could have got in to do it, because there’s always somebody in my place keeping an eye on things. If I’m out, then I get somebody else to stand in for me.’

‘Show us the way then. Have you tidied up the room?’

‘Of course. I wasn’t having any of my rooms in such a state. Suppose the landlord had called in to inspect them. I’d have got the sack. Jobs aren’t easy to come by at my age. I restored the room as it should be and Mr. Smith is going to get the bill when he turns up again.’

‘Does he owe any rent?’

‘No. He always paid monthly in advance and never missed. He was a good tenant. I don’t know what came over him.’

‘How long has he been with you?’

‘About two years on and off. Why?’

They had reached the second floor. Long corridors with four doors on each side and a W.C. at the end.

‘This is it.’

The woman padded noiselessly along in her felt slippers and opened one of the doors with her pass-key which hung from her waist on a chain, like a gaoler’s.

It was all straight and tidy and she stood aside to let them pass and then followed them inside to see that they didn’t disturb things.

‘You may leave us here. We want to have a look around. We’ll let you know when we’re ready to go.’

The concierge looked blankly at Lindemann and seemed to be gathering her reserves of strength together for a show of resistance. Then, she decided

that she'd better not try conclusions with the police and turned and left them after firing a parting shot.

'See you leave the place as you found it. It took me a whole morning clearing up the damage.'

'When did you find the place in disorder?'

'Two days ago.'

She returned to emphasise her point.

'Mr. Smith hadn't been in his room for a day or two, but I'd been busy and left things. Then I thought I'd better see what had been going on. It was a shambles.'

'One other thing before you go ... Mrs....'

'Pfiffner ...'

'Was Cling or Smith away from his room a lot, Mrs. Pfiffner? I mean, did he regularly occupy it?'

'Yes, quite a lot. He was a commercial traveller, he said. He went all over the world and would sometimes be away for weeks at a time. He paid for his room, occupied or empty, because he said he wanted a place to call his own and to keep his things in. It suited me. He paid the rent. Why should I complain? He was a good tenant, even if he didn't always behave as I'd have liked. I'm a respectable woman, but in a job like mine one has to close one's eyes now and then.'

Lindemann raised his eyebrows.

'What do you mean?'

'He used to bring a woman here. I'm sure she wasn't his wife. Or, his sister ...'

'We'll discuss that later. Meanwhile, we'd better just examine the room. That will be all.'

'What about when he comes back and hears that the police have been around in his absence?'

'He won't come back. He's dead.'

Mrs. Pfiffner's face remained impassive.

'I'm sorry to hear it. He was never any trouble. But it leaves me with a problem, doesn't it? What about his belongings? Somebody might have let me know. I've people always asking for rooms. If I'd known this one was becoming vacant ...'

'Wait for us down below. We'll call on our way out.'

She shuffled off after giving the pair of them a despairing look as though their stupidity had landed her in a pretty fix.

The room was a small one, neat and compact. The usual kind found in small hotels. An iron bed, a chest, a wardrobe, a worn arm-chair and a small tattered cane-bottomed one, and an old-fashioned shabby wash-basin with h. and c.

Lindemann looked blankly around.

‘I suppose she’s completely tidied up this place and even gone to the extent of dusting off all the fingerprints. We’d better send our men along and see what they can find. Meanwhile, let’s look at what he left behind.’

There was little of interest. A spare suit and an old raincoat and slouch hat in the wardrobe. They bore the name tags of a London store. A couple of ties and a crumpled nylon shirt in the top drawers of the chest. In the bottom one a soiled shirt, a pair of worn shoes, an empty chocolate box and a perfume bottle with a few drops of scent left in it. Littlejohn sniffed it. It brought back a recollection of the night when he’d found Cling’s body in his hired car.

‘I think this is the perfume I smelled faintly in the car when I found Cling’s body.’

Lindemann then sniffed at the bottle as well.

‘You may be right. It must have belonged to his woman, the one he used to bring here with him. The faint smell of perfume you mention may have come from his companion in the car. On the other hand, his clothes, or rather his coat, bore the faint scent when his body was taken to the medico-legal institute. The doctor there remarked on it. It may have been there either from close contact with the woman or she may have jokingly sprayed some of it on him.’

Somehow, to Littlejohn, it didn’t seem to tally with Cling’s way. The unemotional detective, frolicking about with an unknown woman among chocolate boxes and bottles of scent. And yet, as Bellin had said, Cling might have been a totally different person when he was off duty.

‘It looks as if someone called here after Cling’s death and gave the room a thorough turning over, Superintendent. I wonder what they were after. Papers, records, money ...? In spite of Cling’s regarding this place as a *pied à terre*, he seems to have kept a mere minimum of belongings here.’

‘Just like he did in his London flat. It makes one wonder where his headquarters really were.’

They finished their searches. Nothing.

‘I’ll send the experts along, then, although I don’t suppose it will be of much use. The next thing is to find the woman. Another needle in a haystack. Shall we go down and have another session with Mrs. Pfiffner?’

She was waiting in state to receive them this time. She’d combed back her hair tidily and put on a clean white apron. There was a man sitting with her in her den. A little weasel of a fellow with a slight squint.

‘This is my husband. I sent for him. He works in the market. I thought I’d better have his support with the police questioning me.’

Mr. Pfiffner, who was still in his working clothes, nodded and tried to put on an affable smile. He was a bit overawed by the police.

‘A pleasure, gentlemen.’

His wife had already primed him, but he was embarrassed. He wasn’t married to Mrs. Pfiffner, who had assumed his name. On the run from a wife elsewhere, he’d fetched up in a room at 13bis and finally joined the concierge in an irregular union. Again plotting flight from his present partner, he was suffering from conflicting sentiments.

‘You cleaned up Mr. Cling’s room thoroughly?’

‘You mean Mr. Smith’s.’

‘Of course. You cleaned the room completely.’

‘Yes. I don’t believe in half measures.’

Mr. Pfiffner nodded as though he understood.

‘What did you do with the rubbish you cleared out?’

‘Put it in the bins and the dustmen carried it off.’

‘All of it?’

‘Certainly. I hope you’re not suggesting I stole anything.’

‘No. What *did* you put in the bins?’

‘Dusty old wine bottles, odds and ends of paper, mostly from chocolate boxes and packets, and some old magazines and newspapers.’

‘No documents or written papers of any kind?’

‘No. Certainly not. I expected Mr. Smith to return and didn’t aim at trouble for taking away his private property.’

Mr. Pfiffner grunted his approval just to show he was there and endorsing his partner’s ethics. He was a man of conscience, even if his feelings did run away with him sometimes.

Lindemann paused.

‘Have you any questions you wish to ask, Superintendent?’

‘No. Carry on.’

‘Now about Mr. Smith’s lady friend. How often did she visit him?’

‘One or twice a week when he was living in his room. She never came near when he was away.’

‘Swiss?’

‘I’d say so. From these parts. They spoke French. His French wasn’t good. She mustn’t have known English.’

‘How old?’

‘I’d put her down as a little over thirty. She was well preserved and neat. Mr. Smith’s fancy didn’t extend to young girls, like some I know. I respected him for that.’

‘She seemed respectable?’

‘If by that you mean he hadn’t picked her up off the street, yes. She was very self-possessed and, I’d say, if she was to run a home and family, she’d be very efficient. She gave me that impression.’

‘You saw a lot of her?’

‘Yes. He didn’t exactly introduce her to me, but when they came here together, they didn’t creep in as though they were doing something wrong. They walked in and I got quite a good look at her. She didn’t seem at all ashamed. She might have been calling on business.’

‘Perhaps she was.’

‘And perhaps she wasn’t.’

Mr. Pfiffner laughed at his wife’s wit. A hollow, pathetic sound.

‘Now, tell me what she looked like.’

Mrs. Pfiffner had to pause for thought about that one. She began to draw pictures in the air as though trying to conjure up a vision of some kind.

‘She was about my height, I’d say. And she had a small upturned nose. I remember that, because it was the only feature of a cocotte that she had about her.’

Mr. Pfiffner jerked his head up and then buried his chin in his chest as though suffering from guilty memories of some kind.

Littlejohn himself could think of many upturned, dainty little noses owned by very respectable women, but Mrs. Pfiffner’s standards must have been much more severe.

‘She’d dark brown hair. And one thing I particularly noticed was that there was a grey lock in the front of it. Some women have that done

artificially for show, these days, but in her case it didn't strike me as made-up. It looked as though she might have gone grey from shock.'

'Go on, you're doing very nicely.'

'Thank you. A pointed chin and the bones of her cheeks were a bit high. Good complexion and healthy, although from where I was standing, all that might have been put on.'

'Colour of eyes?'

'I never got close enough. I'd say dark. Her type usually has brown eyes. I'd say brown.'

'Did she look like a manual worker, a seamstress, a factory worker? Or a shop or office girl?'

'Certainly not a hand-worker. As for shop and office girls, they get themselves up like duchesses these days. She wasn't that sort. Perhaps she was a teacher.'

'A nurse perhaps?'

They all looked at Mr. Pfiffner as he said it. His wife more than the rest.

'What do you know about it?' snapped his partner, and he shut up.

But he did know quite a lot. During his recent visits to an eye clinic about his squint, he'd been attended to by a nurse whose qualities had made him revolt against those of the concierge. Not that he'd any hopes of setting up shop with his idol, but it had made him decide to run for it and make a better choice next time. Now, he retired within himself.

'Did she use scent?'

'If you're referring to the smell of Mr. Smith's room, she did. I got a whiff of it as she passed. Pretty strong and pretty expensive, I'd say. There were a few drops in a bottle I found on the floor and I put it back in a drawer. It was called *Passion Flower*. I remember it, because it seemed a funny name to me.'

Mr. Pfiffner's eyes slowly closed and opened again as though he were savouring the perfume above the aroma of anaesthetics and antiseptics in the eye clinic.

'How did you know the name? There's no label on the bottle.'

'It was in a box that had got soaked with water. I found it under the wash basin. I threw the box away.'

So much for the fingerprints, and other traces the room had once held. Gone to the city rubbish dump.

'And that is all?'

‘Yes. I’d recognise her if I saw her picture.’

‘We’ll have to try to get one. When did you last see Smith?’

‘He was here last Thursday. He hadn’t stayed the night. He just came in and out again. He left about four o’clock. The woman wasn’t with him.’

On his way to his death.

Mont-Choisi

THE TECHNICIANS had rapidly done their work. Mrs. Pfiffner had not quite obliterated all the traces of Cling and his woman from the bedroom and, after a battle with the concierge about taking her fingerprints for purposes of elimination, the men sorted out several which tallied with those taken from Cling's dead fingers. The woman's prints were scattered among those of Mrs. Pfiffner on an empty chocolate box with an elaborate lid, which the concierge had kept aside for herself from the litter of the bedroom.

The woman associated with Cling had never passed through the hands of the city police before and, therefore, neither her prints nor those of Cling were, so far, any contribution to the investigation.

Whilst all this was going on, Littlejohn, having been established in a hotel as the guest of the Geneva police, took himself off to Ferney-Voltaire by tram for an excursion before dinner. As he was anxious to meet *Mme. Vincent*, Cobb's daughter, he asked Lindemann to telephone her, introduce him and ask if it would be convenient for her to see him right away. She said she would be glad to meet any visitor from England, especially Littlejohn, of whom her father had recently spoken.

Littlejohn found Ferney, a village of some size, about four miles from Geneva on the road to Gex. The tram stopped at the village centre and Littlejohn enquired the way to *Mont-Choisi* at the bookshop. It lay in the same direction as the château and he walked there in less than ten minutes.

Mont-Choisi was like a small château itself, a spreading two-storeyed place, with a further extension like a small penthouse, erected on top. The house was surrounded by old trees and ornamental lawns and gardens. A pillared porch and a large front door. Littlejohn rang the bell.

Cobb's daughter received him in the vast drawing-room, fitted with two large crystal chandeliers and exquisite antique furniture, and gave him tea. Their conversation until they had broken the ice was of her father, England, Geneva ... and then Cling was mentioned.

Sir Ensor's daughter didn't resemble her father at all. She must have been approaching forty and looked entirely French. Dark hair and large dark

eyes, oval face, straight nose and a good chin. If not exactly a beauty, very handsome. Later Littlejohn learned that Sir Ensor's late wife had been a Frenchwoman.

They spoke in English.

'This has been a very upsetting affair for my husband and me. Cling was, as you know, staying here when the crime was committed. It was a new and very unpleasant experience for us to have a guest murdered.'

'I'm sure it was. Did you see much of him?'

'No. He had stayed here a time or two before when on duty with my father, but he was a stranger ... one might almost say a recluse of a man. You couldn't call him shy. Nobody with Cling's personality could possibly be shy. He was too self-confident for that. But he only spoke when he needed to do so in the ordinary way of social politeness. Nobody seemed to learn much about him, except Pflüger, our butler, who got on very well with him.'

'Cling stayed in the servants' quarters?'

'Strange to say, at his own request. He didn't seem to wish to mix with us. I suggest you have a talk with Pflüger before you go. He may be able to help.'

'I was going to suggest it.'

'My husband is away at a medical conference in Paris and the children are back at school in Lausanne. I am glad to get a rest after this distressing affair. We had the police here for days and days. They carefully cleared out Cling's belongings from his room. From what I hear, he hadn't many and, such as they were, they proved of no interest to the Geneva police in their enquiry. There was one matter however, I must tell you about. I intended advising the police, but as they said you were coming here, I kept it for you.'

She needed no questioning. She was very volatile and an amiable chatterbox, fluent with both hands and speech in a very charming way which would cause no boredom or annoyance. Now, she was obviously preparing something she thought very dramatic judging from the way she lowered her voice.

She crossed the room to a small desk and took something from one of the drawers.

'That,' she said and placed it in Littlejohn's hand.

It was a single, second-class ticket to Zürich.

‘Where did this come from, madam?’

‘After the Cling tragedy and the police had tramped all over and generally disturbed the room he occupied, I felt it must be properly cleared out. We therefore took up the carpet this morning and sent it to the cleaners. That ticket was under the carpet, near the edge, just hidden. As you will see, it bears the date of Cling’s death. Had it not been for that date of issue, I’d have thought it might easily have been lost by someone else who’d occupied the room and lain there for some time. As it is, Cling must have dropped it and either he or the girl who tidied his room must have unwittingly kicked it under the carpet. That was how the police came to miss it.’

‘May I take this with me, please? I’ll see that the Geneva police get it.’

‘Of course. Poor Cling didn’t get to use it. My father told me he was an enthusiastic excursionist when off duty. He must have intended making a trip to Zürich, although it’s a fair distance from Geneva for a day trip. As a matter of fact, Cling couldn’t have done it and been back in time to meet my father after the conference closed for the day. It takes four or five hours to get from Geneva to Zürich by train. Perhaps that’s why he took a single only. He may have intended returning by air, which can be done in half an hour.’

‘Did you get any idea of Cling’s other excursions during his off-time here?’

‘No; but he may have told Pflüger. Perhaps you’d like to have a talk with him. It’s been his afternoon off, but I saw him returning as we were discussing Cling.’

‘That would be a very good idea. I must get back to Geneva for dinner and I’d like a word or two with Pflüger before I go.’

‘I’ll leave you then and you can talk with him here ...’

She rang the bell and bade him good-bye and by the time he’d thanked her Pflüger was there.

Pflüger’s name sounded German, but he looked more like a Corsican. Smallish, thin and nimble, with dark sharp eyes and a hatchet face. He told Littlejohn what he already knew, that he’d once been a waiter at the Savoy. He also said, perhaps by way of a hint to Littlejohn, that when the children were home from school, madame always insisted on the exclusive use of English in the house.

Littlejohn invited Pflüger to sit whilst they talked, which the butler did, but with some uneasiness. To him, it appeared to be like brawling in church for a servant to be seated in the *salon*. When Littlejohn, whom madame had invited to smoke his pipe, offered Pflüger a cigarette, he politely declined it, as though that were carrying a good thing too far.

‘I believe you saw quite a lot of Mr. Cling whilst he was staying here.’

‘Yes, sir. And I got on very well with him. His death has upset me very much.’

‘What did he do in his spare time, his off-hours, whilst he was here?’

‘He went out quite a lot. As I told the Swiss police, Mr. Cling was an intelligent man who took an interest in many things. For example, he was an enthusiastic follower of Voltaire. I was able to obtain permission for him to visit the château in Ferney, which is usually strictly private, as the owners live there.’

‘Where else did he go?’

‘He liked walking and often went for walks around. I didn’t of course, go with him. When Sir Ensor is here, I am usually busy. Mr. Cling also enjoyed a game or two of cricket with the young gentlemen here, who were very fond of him.’

‘And he didn’t tell you where his walks took him?’

‘Not usually. I never asked him. It was best to let him start the talking. He was a reserved man who didn’t open up much when questioned. If you let him talk as he wished that was the best way of conducting a conversation.’

‘Did he ever mention visiting Zürich?’

Pflüger smiled patronisingly, as though he knew all about it.

‘You are thinking of the rail ticket. No. He never once mentioned Zürich. Once or twice he asked me the best way of getting to and from some place. He went to the château of Coppet where Madame de Staël once lived. When he returned he seemed to know all about it and her. A remarkable man for accumulating information. Another time, he made a trip to the Lac de Joux, above Rolle. He didn’t tell me he was going, nor did he mention it afterwards. Fleury, one of the taxi owners in the village, told me he’d hired him for the trip. It was one Sunday last autumn when he and Sir Ensor were here and when Sir Ensor proposed to stay indoors and do some work and he sent Cling off for the day. Cling didn’t much like it. He was

keen on his work and had Sir Ensor not got angry or impatient about his being fussy, would hardly have allowed him out of his sight.'

'What did Cling want at the Lac de Joux?'

'Do you know it, sir?'

'No.'

'It lies in a valley above Rolle, which is about twenty miles from here. It is best to cross into Switzerland and go to Rolle, then up through Gimel to Le Brassus. The lake is in an isolated valley, much favoured for winter sport and some of the Geneva people have summer houses there for when it gets too hot on the lake of Geneva. The district is very beautiful and it is a peaceful spot for a day's outing. According to Fleury, Mr. Cling didn't go as far as the lake itself. He had evidently some object in mind, although he didn't say so. He told Fleury to stop at several villages *en route*, which gave Fleury the idea that Mr. Cling was trying to put him off the real purpose of the little trip. Finally he told Fleury to pull up at the village of Avène, not far from Le Brassus, and said he was going to take a walk in the vicinity. He was away about three hours. Then, he ordered Fleury to return to Ferney. That was the most I ever heard of Mr. Cling's excursions from here.'

'Do you know Avène?'

'I have never been there, but have heard about it. It was once almost deserted. A quiet place in a grassy spot in a little valley. A company from Geneva bought the whole village and the land for a distance around it. They constructed a clinic there, which consists of main buildings and a number of villas and pavilions for patients. It is more like a colony of wealthy people than a clinic. In fact, you wouldn't think it was a clinic at all.'

'For tuberculosis?'

Pflüger smiled gently.

'Oh dear no, sir. For psychopathic cases. Wealthy people from all over the world. I believe there are several good doctors there. Specialists in mental complaints. Of course they tell me the patients aren't exactly mad. There may be a few there, tucked away by their families in a spot where they will be kindly treated and cared for. The majority are there for treatment or seclusion in a pleasant place. The fees must be very large to support an institution and doctors like those.'

'Is Dr. Vincent connected with it?'

‘No. The master is a surgeon. I got my information about it from the village grocer, whose brother was once an orderly at *Les Plaisances*—that’s the name of the clinic.’

Littlejohn felt at a loss. He obviously couldn’t go through the whole rigmarole of wringing from Pflüger precisely how Cling had spent all his spare time at *Mont-Choisi*. He thanked the butler and left him with a promise to return if he had any further questions to ask.

On the way back to the tram, Littlejohn decided that a good burglary, forgery, or even a murder conducted in straightforward fashion would be an immense relief. He even felt he preferred some of the professionals of the crime business to Cling. To think of crime at home in England was even relaxing. Here the antics of Cling were beginning to pall. First, to choose Littlejohn’s hired car in which to be murdered. Then, the divided interests between London and Geneva, followed by the discovery of the furtive affair in the sordid little room near Eaux-Vives. And now an excursion to a psychopathic clinic in the hills.

‘Where to?’

The conductor looked indignant.

‘Sorry, Geneva-Cornavin.’

He called on Lindemann again and gave him the ticket to Zürich and told him about Cling’s trip to *Les Plaisances*.

‘Perhaps it would be as well for you and I to take a run out to *Les Plaisances* after dinner, if you can spare the time, Superintendent.’

‘I’m quite at your disposal, Lindemann. In fact, had I been running the case at home, that would have been the next step.’

‘If you are free, we can dine on the way there. I know a very nice place on the lakeside at Nyon.’

It suited Littlejohn. He was beginning to wish there were handy Thames-side restaurants and expense accounts to match in which he could entertain collaborators with Scotland Yard.

‘We know *Les Plaisances* very well. A quiet, very respectable clinic with a first-rate staff. It costs a fortune to be a patient there, however. I wonder what Cling found there to interest him.’

‘I can’t help recollecting what the poor little henpecked Pfiffner at the hotel in the Rue Jacobi said. Cling’s companion might have been a nurse. Why would he say that? She surely didn’t turn up in uniform and, in mufti, there’s little to distinguish a nurse from any other woman.’

‘That’s right. And the way his wife shut him up when he mentioned it. It may be they’ve found out in some way. We’ll get him in whilst we’re discussing the rest of the case.’

Lindemann rang for an orderly and told him to send a car to 13bis Rue Jacobi and bring in Pfiffner.

‘He should be home again now. The day’s work’s finished.’

Lindemann laid the ticket to Zürich on the table between them.

‘And now, this. We’ve enquired and it was issued at the Gare de Cornavin ticket office. What do you think?’

‘Mme. Vincent suggested that Cling might have planned a trip to Zürich; one way by train and returning by plane, which takes only half an hour compared with a four or five hours’ train journey.’

‘Right. He was an ardent excursionist.’

‘But such a thing isn’t in keeping with Cling’s nature. The day he was murdered and the day following were working days for him. That is, he’d to spend at least part of them keeping an eye on Sir Ensor. Those were his instructions, however stupid Sir Ensor thought them, and Cling wasn’t the type to avoid them. Whatever else he was or proves to have been, he was a diligent officer. Why, when he had Sir Ensor’s safety on his mind, should he go scuttering on an excursion to Zürich and incur the expense of travelling one way by air? He was far from extravagant. He’d booked his rail ticket second class.’

‘What was he up to then?’

‘Doesn’t it seem that he was bolting? Quietly and carefully leaving the scene. First of all, he books a single to Zürich. If he hadn’t lost the ticket, we’d never have known he had decided to fly from Zürich. The first place one would think of in such a case would be Geneva airport. We’d find nothing there. If we decided to try Basle and Zürich airports, it would take more time and allow him to get farther away. That’s where his training as a detective came in. It also accounts for his buying his ticket to Zürich in advance. The clerk at the ticket office would forget him among the shower of tickets he’d issued to Zürich.’

‘But where and why was he fleeing?’

‘The *why* we’ll have to find out later. The *where* ... I’d say New York perhaps. Is there a midnight plane to America from Zürich?’

A quick enquiry over the telephone.

‘No. The daily plane leaves around noon and calls at Geneva. There’s a nine o’clock jet to Montreal and Chicago in the morning, however.’

‘That’s it. His wife lives in Chicago.’

‘His wife?’

‘She ran away from Cling during the war and he always believed he’d get her back. Either he loved her very much, or else he regarded the recovery of her affections as a challenge to him. He didn’t divorce her, never remarried, never even cut her out of his will. She decamped with an American G.I. and they set up house in Chicago as man and wife. The G.I. died recently. Cling must have intended making another attempt. It’s just fantastic. She was a mere girl when she left him. Nineteen in fact, in 1941. Now she’ll be forty and, I suppose, completely changed. In fact, she has two or three children by her second husband, if such you can call him.’

‘It *is* fantastic. Almost too fantastic to be true. He might have returned to England from Zürich.’

‘To lose his job, as a deserter? Not likely. And suppose there’s something criminal at the back of it all. He’d be easily picked up there. My guess is Chicago.’

‘And he never made it, but got killed instead.’

‘Yes. That tallies, too. All was set for flight. Sir Ensor was safely out of the way for hours at the dinner and Cling was ready for his train to Zürich. But he’d lost his ticket. You can imagine his anger at the hitch in his plan. In the quiet station in the evening after the day’s rush was over he might be much more easily recognised. He seized on a better plan of getting to Zürich. He’d just left Sir Ensor and me in the forecourt of the hotel and I’d parked my hired car right to his hand. He crossed to the garage and told a good tale. They handed him the duplicate keys. And, then, as he was settling in his stolen car for his journey, someone caught up with him ...’

There was a pause.

‘You might ring up the Swiss Airways and find out if one of the places booked on their Chicago flight on the morning after Cling’s death was not claimed, and ask who booked it.’

‘I’ll do that right away.’

Lindemann gave the necessary instructions and asked for an urgent reply.

‘The idea of Cling’s flight also fits in with his behaviour in the matter of his rooms. In both London and Geneva, he seems to have gathered up his

things, destroyed anything he didn't need in the way of papers and records, and merely left the furniture and other useless odds and ends behind.'

'That is right, Superintendent. But, whereas, according to you, his London flat was left undisturbed, someone thought he might have hidden or left behind something in his Geneva room and turned the place upside down in search of it ...'

Further discussion was interrupted by the arrival of Ernest Pfiffner. He was accompanied by his wife who had insisted on keeping him company, because she asserted the police were arresting him for the murder of Cling. Explanations by the officers who'd called for him had been useless. She'd kept them waiting whilst she put on her best hat and frock and had then joined the party in the police car protesting vociferously all the way.

'He's so easily taken in and persuaded,' she told the police when she and her lord and master entered, as though, somehow, the police were going to request little Pfiffner to oblige them by confessing to the crime and thus allow them to get on with some other jobs.

Lindemann at length got a word in edgeways.

'When we saw you earlier in the day, M. Pfiffner, you suggested that Mr. Cling's companion might have been a nurse. How did you arrive at that idea?'

Pfiffner looked alarmed. He began to stammer. His wife, however, was having none of it. She intervened and persisted in speaking in spite of the fact that Lindemann threatened that she'd have to leave the room if she didn't shut up.

'I won't be quiet. It was me who told him. I suppose unless I tell you all about it, you'll keep on pestering Pfiffner until he breaks down and confesses he killed the man himself. Well, he didn't. I told him the woman was a nurse. I found it out from the papers in her bag.'

'And how did you obtain the papers?'

'She left her handbag in Mr. Smith's room one day. They both went out together and I noticed she hadn't her bag with her ...'

'Very observant of you.'

'I don't miss much and it was just one of those things. I saw she wasn't carrying it.'

'So you went up to the room and rifled the bag.'

'I did not. I went up to the room to see if it needed tidying. I saw the bag on the bed where she'd forgotten it. She must have been upset about

something. Women don't forget their handbags like that unless there's something wrong. I'd often wondered who she was and where she came from. And that's all I looked at. Her papers. Then I heard somebody coming up the stairs, so I closed the bag and met her on her way back for it. She snatched it and hurried away.'

'Her name?'

'Albertine Durand. Nurse, *Clinique Les Plaisances*, Avène, Vaud. I must have told my husband. That's why he remembered she'd been a nurse.'

'You've a good memory, Madame Pfiffner, when you choose to exercise it.'

'I know Avène. One of my friends was born near there. Also, I've heard of the clinic, Albertine Durand ... Well ... It's not a hard name to remember.'

Probably she'd made a note of it somewhere.

'And that was all?'

'Yes. Should there be more?'

'No. You can both go, thank you.'

'What about getting home? We came to oblige you, you know.'

'You can have the police car again. You'll find it at the door.'

The telephone rang and Lindemann answered it. He turned to Littlejohn after he'd finished.

'There was a vacant seat on the Chicago plane. It was booked in the name of Alexander Cling. He arranged to pick up the ticket at Zürich airport after sending the cost by post.'

'That's straightforward enough. It was the only sensible thing for him to do. Presumably, in his position in the police, he'd have no difficulty in obtaining a visa for America in his own name. It would have been folly to have masqueraded as someone else, even on a plane ticket. So, he left Albertine Durand in the lurch. I'd expect that if he'd gone to Chicago he was going to see his wife again. Cling never let up, did he?'

'But what made him suddenly decide to go?'

'That's a thing we'll have to find out. Perhaps we'd better make our trip to *Les Plaisances* and see Miss Durand—if she's still there.'

Les Plaisances

IT WAS too late in the day for them to dine before making the trip to *Les Plaisances* and Littlejohn and Lindemann set out as soon as they got rid of the Pfiffners.

They made for Rolle by the new motor-road and then turned into the interior on the rising route to Avène. It was not a long way to *Les Plaisances*, but the route changed from vine-covered slopes to rocky defiles and then woods as they passed through Gimel spa. The curving road brought them to the pass through the hills and from there they could see Avène.

Les Plaisances lay in a fertile valley lit by the evening sun and had the appearance of a series of prosperous farms, which were actually the various pavilions, châlets and dormitories of the clinic. The headquarters were in a well-kept eighteenth century château approached through high gates and by a long path through parkland. There was no suggestion of prison or asylum restraint and the estate seemed to be bounded merely by tall hedges.

Work was still going on in the surrounding fields and men and women who might have been patients were walking leisurely about the buildings and meadows. The front of the château was laid out in formal gardens bright with flowers and there, too, people were strolling or sitting in the last of the sunshine, calmly and enjoyably, like visitors in a public park.

The police car drew up at the large main door and Littlejohn and Lindemann climbed the flight of five stone steps which led up to it.

A man sitting on a seat at the foot of the steps bade them good-evening.

‘Very pleasant here in the evening sunshine. Have you come far?’

‘From Geneva.’

‘If you happen to return to Paris, you might tell His Majesty that it is time I returned. There is work to be done and I have rested long enough. Tell him that Cardinal Richelieu sends his humble greeting, will you?’

Lindemann tugged at the bell-pull and an orderly in uniform answered the door.

‘Could we speak with the superintendent? We’re from the Geneva police.’

The man showed no sign of surprise. Perhaps it was a regular occurrence for people to call from strange places.

‘Dr. Binger is away, but his deputy, Dr. Fauconnet, will, no doubt, be pleased to receive you. Kindly wait in the hall.’

It was a fine place with a large staircase, ascending straight ahead and great windows overlooking the fields and distant hills. Three massive chandeliers, two of them partially lighted, hung from the high ceiling. Full length portraits and pictures on the panelled walls and comfortable chairs and settees scattered about and in front of the open hearth in which a log fire was burning.

It all gave the impression of an hotel-de-luxe, quiet, civilised and furnished in impeccable taste. There were guests sitting here and there, some reading, others chatting together. No suggestion of a mental clinic whatever, except that now and then some oddity manifested itself for a brief minute and was gone.

Littlejohn and Lindemann stood in front of the window admiring the view. A tall scholarly man in gold-rimmed spectacles touched Littlejohn’s arm.

‘You are being attended to?’

‘Yes, thanks.’

‘Admiring the view from here?’

‘Yes. Beautiful, isn’t it?’

‘Beautiful indeed.

A sylvan scene, and, as the ranks ascend
Shade above shade, a woody theatre
Of stateliest view...’

‘I had England in mind when I wrote that, of course. But this will do. My name is John Milton. You may have heard of me.’

And he left them as quietly as he had come.

The orderly was back. Nobody but John Milton had taken any notice of the newcomers. Their good manners seemed to suit the place.

‘Dr. Fauconnet will see you.’

He led them to a heavy door in one corner of the hall, opened it, took them down a short passage and announced them. Beyond was a large room with a desk across the far corner. To travel the distance between the door and this desk over the noisy parquet flooring might have cut the average visitor down to size, but now Littlejohn and Lindemann were spared the ordeal. The occupant of the desk rose to meet them.

A small, lightly-built, dark sharp-featured woman, middle-aged and with grey hair. She wore heavy black-rimmed spectacles and was dressed in a tweed skirt and white blouse with a grey cardigan over it. She walked to greet them with a casual silent step and inturned toes, like a stalking leopard.

‘Good afternoon, gentlemen.’

She shook hands with them, returned to her desk and seated herself behind it. Then she offered them seats in what were presumably chairs reserved for patients.

She did not beat about the bush either. She had the attitude of a head teacher interviewing senior pupils and had an antagonising way of seeming to hold the whip hand from the start.

‘I see from your card, Chief Inspector Lindemann, that you are from Geneva. Superintendent Littlejohn, I observe is from London. On the face of it, I assume you are from the Federal police?’

‘No, doctor. I am from the Geneva city force and my colleague is collaborating with me on a case which involves London as well as Geneva ...’

‘I must ask you to explain ...’

Lindemann could have commented that she hadn’t yet given him a chance, but hadn’t the time.

‘... This affair was reported to the police at Rolle, who, in turn passed on the information to the headquarters of the cantonal police at Lausanne. An Inspector from Lausanne has already been here and interviewed those concerned. I fail to see ...’

‘Excuse me, madam, but I must ask you what affair you are talking about. Does it concern the matter of a murder in Geneva?’

‘No. An attempted suicide by one of our staff.’

‘Nurse Albertine Durand?’

‘I see you know about it.’

‘We do not. But such an event ties up with the case we are investigating.’

Dr. Fauconnet rose, took two or three prowling steps round her desk, and ended up at a window, gazing out across the valley, with her hands behind her back. She didn’t even look at the two men as she passed them, but seemed lost in her own meditations.

‘Tell me about the case.’

She remained with her back to them still.

Lindemann flushed to the roots of his fair hair.

‘If you will be good enough to be seated again and face us, it will be much easier to discuss the affair with you.’

She smiled for the first time, as though humouring him, but returned to her chair.

‘Is that better?’

‘Thank you. Briefly, on Thursday night, about eight o’clock, an Englishman named Alec Cling was murdered in Geneva. In the course of our investigation it has come to light that Cling had an association with a certain Albertine Durand, a nurse in your clinic. We called in the hope of interviewing Miss Durand. We thought she might be of help to us in our enquiries.’

‘And you, Superintendent Littlejohn ... I take it you speak French ... Yes? You are here because the man was English?’

‘Not exactly. Cling was found dead in my car. He was a detective assigned to the security of a British cabinet minister in Geneva; and in the opinion of the Swiss police and myself, the enquiry calls for an English police officer. That, briefly, is why I am with Chief Inspector Lindemann.’

‘I see. I’m sorry it will be quite impossible for you to see Miss Durand. She left *Les Plaisances* for her night off last Thursday and, although she was due, according to rules, to return here before midnight, did not reappear until early the following day. She then had the appearance of having walked the streets all night. Later, she was found unconscious in her room, having taken a large dose of sleeping tablets ... phenobarbitone. She was discovered only just in time and suitably treated. She is still suffering from shock and is unable to see anyone.’

‘Have the local police not interviewed her?’

‘No. I said she could not see *anyone*. The matter was reported to the local police, who contacted Rolle, and, in turn, the cantonal people sent an

officer from Lausanne. Nurse Durand was still unconscious when he arrived, but on the way to recovery. We promised to notify the police as soon as she could talk with them. They know us well enough at *Les Plaisances* to be sure we will co-operate fully with them. That, I'm afraid, is all I can say and you, too, will have to wait.'

'Miss Durand is, according to our files, aged around thirty-five to forty ...'

'She is thirty-five ...'

'Rather small, but robust, brown hair, dark eyes ...'

'Blue ... Rather a strange combination with dark hair.'

'And she had a lock of grey hair at the front among the dark.'

'Quite correct. You have the rough particulars of her. It seems to me that she is the one you're seeking.'

'Can you tell me something about her?'

Dr. Fauconnet removed her spectacles and rubbed her eyes as though the whole subject bored her.

'What do you wish to know?'

'How long has she been at *Les Plaisances*?'

'Eight years. Before that, she was for many years a nurse in the hospital of Le Bon Samaritain in Berne.'

'She is a good nurse?'

'It depends on what you mean by good. She is a trained mental nurse and hitherto her record has been excellent. Since she has been at *Les Plaisances* her behaviour on and off duty has been above reproach.'

'And now?'

'I was not unduly surprised by what happened last Thursday and Friday. I have been interested in her for some time past. She has over the last twelve months shown signs of emotional change and I judged she had a lover. She had not, of course, in any way grown silly or frivolous or careless in her duties, but a sudden temperamental change in a woman of her age might be due to either sex or religion. I guessed it was the former. She took to visiting Geneva more frequently and seemed happier and more energetic.'

'You say you weren't surprised at her recent behaviour.'

'At thirty-five, disappointment or treachery tend to hit the victim hard and cause emotional upheaval. One is not so resilient as in one's teens or twenties. It was obvious she had been betrayed and had taken a short cut out

of reality. She is a sensible girl and when this is over I don't anticipate a recurrence. I think it would be unfair to dispense with her services and when Dr. Binger, the superintendent, returns, if he agrees, Nurse Durand will resume her duties here. In this place, we regard such occurrences as illnesses, like a mental bilious attack, shall I say.'

'Have you, doctor, or anyone else seen the man in question around this place?'

'No. But in her time off, if she hadn't enough of it to allow of her going all the way to Geneva, she has gone to the village, or sometimes to Rolle, dressed up and more fastidiously groomed than once she was. She must have been meeting her lover nearer home.'

'The movements of all your staff are recorded?'

'Not exactly. They are free to go where they wish, provided they return to time. But anything extraordinary happening to staff or patients is reported to me. The matron usually learns such things and mentions them during our daily conferences. This is not gossip, Inspector. You must realise that in a clinic such as this, staff and patients are more emotionally bound together. Nurse Durand's affairs did not escape notice.'

'I see. It seems that she had arranged to meet Cling in Geneva last Thursday. Did she leave *Les Plaisances* with all her possessions?'

'No. She had apparently removed the bulk of them before then. She took one suitcase with her when she left, saying to a friend that she was taking things to the cleaners on the way. Her room was later found more or less empty. Her suitcase had been deposited in the cloakroom at Cornavin Station, Geneva. We found the ticket in her purse and later claimed the bag. The rest of her belongings will be recovered as soon as she can tell us where she left them.'

'Cling had apparently arranged a rendezvous for Thursday. He himself had booked a ticket to Zürich. There was not a similar ticket in Nurse Durand's purse?'

'No.'

'Then he was about to desert her from the looks of it. We think he planned going to America. He didn't turn up at the meeting place. According to the time arranged, he was either defaulting or dead. Miss Durand waited for him and, finally, the truth must have dawned ...'

'There was a copy of the Geneva morning paper on the table of her room when we found her. It reported the death of Cling. She must have

bought a copy and read the news.'

'And tried to kill herself.'

'That is to be assumed.'

'There is a chance that Nurse Durand may have murdered Cling.'

'It would seem so.'

Dr. Fauconnet might have been dissecting a patient's case before admitting her to the clinic. It was all done coldly, methodically, almost with relish.

'Cling was obviously fleeing for some reason and Miss Durand was connected with the flight. You see, therefore, how important it is that we obtain a statement from her as soon as possible.'

'Yes. But she cannot be questioned now. We will see what the night brings for her. If she is fit tomorrow morning, I will telephone you and arrange a brief session. But it must be brief, and I will not have her disturbed by questions which will agitate her. You fully understand.'

'I do. And now, doctor, I would like to see the matron.'

Dr. Fauconnet frowned at Lindemann.

'Why? There is nothing she knows that I cannot tell you about this affair.'

'I would prefer to see her. And to make the matter seem less official, I would like to interview her without your being there, please.'

Littlejohn felt a glow of satisfaction. Hitherto the doctor had dominated the interview. Now, they were making progress.

'This is a most inconvenient time, Inspector. Dinner will be served soon and ...'

'All the same, I would like to see matron immediately.'

No reply.

'Of course, if you wish, she could call at the police station in Rolle. We could interview her there. I don't know how my friend Superintendent Littlejohn feels about it, but I don't propose to cool my heels here until dinner is over.'

'Very well. I'll send for her. You may interview her in the ante-room. But I think this is quite uncalled for.'

She rang through on the internal telephone.

'Miss Petimaître. Please come to my room.'

Matron wore a white coat and her general appearance was starchier than the doctor's. She herself was starchier, too. It was quite obvious from the

start that she was under the latter's thumb. A tall bouncing Aryan of around fifty, with fair hair swept back and tightly gathered in a bun at the back of her head.

‘You rang, doctor.’

She bared her even teeth in a smile which reminded Littlejohn of a talking doll.

‘These gentlemen are from the police and wish to interview you about Nurse Durand. The ante-room is free and you may see them there.’

And Dr. Fauconnet opened a file on her desk and began to read it without again looking up.

The ante-room was small and very high. It gave the claustrophobic sensation of a confessional box, presumably to condition callers for their reception in the doctor's office. There was a table in the middle and the police and the nurse sat round it on three chairs like a trio of plotters.

Miss Petitmaître, tight-lipped now and stubborn-looking, was obviously going to treat the visitors with a high hand. Lindemann therefore thought it well to deflate her a bit.

‘Name, please.’

Matron paused as though wondering whether or not she was a suspect. She had left Dr. Fauconnet's office backwards, like a suppliant leaving the royal presence, but judging from her expression, especially the steel blue eyes, she had determined to treat the detectives as patients.

‘Really. Is that necessary?’

‘If you please.’

‘Madeleine Petitmaître.’

‘Age and place of birth?’

‘Forty-nine. Villeneuve, Vaud.’

Lindemann wrote them down in his book although Littlejohn had the impression the details didn't matter to him at all.

‘You know Nurse Durand well?’

‘Yes. She has been with us eight years.’

‘How long have you been here, matron?’

‘Twelve years.’

‘And you have found Miss Durand reliable and devoted to her duties all the time she has been with you?’

‘Yes.’

There were no signs of pleasure now from the flashing teeth. The lips were tight and the brow like thunder.

‘Has she at any time in the past attempted to take her own life?’

‘Certainly not. She has hitherto been a very sensible girl. I don’t know what came over her.’

‘Didn’t you? You doubtless knew that she had recently taken to herself a lover?’

The matron raised a monitory hand.

‘She would hardly have confided in me about such a matter.’

‘But you knew, all the same. Did you ever see the man?’

‘I did not.’

‘To your knowledge, was Miss Durand on very friendly terms with any of the patients here?’

‘I don’t understand what you mean.’

‘Let me explain. It seems to us that, for some reason, her lover, who, by the way, was murdered in Geneva last Thursday ...’

Matron didn’t move a muscle. She evidently knew all about it.

‘Cling, the dead man, might have had some reason for wishing to contact someone in this clinic, either in the course of his official duties as a detective or for other purposes. His best way of approach might have been through the nursing staff. Nurse Durand, let us say.’

‘I really don’t know what all this is about. I don’t understand why I’ve been interviewed at all. I know nothing about Nurse Durand outside our professional relationship. I shall complain about this to Dr. Binger when he returns.’

‘You’re a strange kind of matron, Miss Petitmaître. I always understood that a woman in your position in a hospital was a sort of mother to her nurses and in their confidence.’

‘You’ve no need to be offensive.’

‘And you have no cause to be unco-operative, matron. You are obviously holding something back from us. Something you didn’t hesitate to tell Dr. Fauconnet in your daily reports.’

‘I still don’t know ...’

It was becoming obvious she was too afraid of Dr. Fauconnet to speak freely without her consent and was of no use at all.

‘Has Nurse Durand a personal friend, a confidante among the staff here?’

‘I can’t say.’

‘If you don’t tell me what you apparently know, I shall go into the clinic and ask the same question of the first member of the staff I meet.’

‘Nurse Hodler.’

‘I wish to see her, please. Where can I find her?’

‘At *Belalp*. That is the châlet across the park there.’

‘Kindly send for her.’

‘There is a telephone across to *Belalp* in my office.’

‘I will come with you whilst you ask for her. I won’t have you threatening her or telling her just how much to say, in the way Dr. Fauconnet has done with you.’

‘I protest.’

‘Shall we go?’

He asked Littlejohn to excuse him and left with the matron.

It was quite still. Somewhere in the building someone was playing the piano beautifully. One of Liszt’s *Consolations*. Littlejohn rose and looked through the window at the park darkening in the dusk. This aspect of the case was becoming a holiday to him. The energetic Lindemann was naturally doing all the work, referring to him now and then for advice or approval. It was Lindemann’s territory and Littlejohn felt like a visiting student seeing how it was all done.

There was a faint tap on the door and a head appeared. It was Cardinal Richelieu. He was panting with hurrying.

‘Forgive the intrusion, please. I saw you looking through the window and thought I might catch you alone if I hurried.’

He slid round the door, through which came a gust of the fine piano music, and carefully closed it.

‘That is Max Hitz playing. He had a breakdown and often plays to us before dinner. The trouble is that once he starts to play it is difficult to get him to stop. But I must hurry. I called to ask you once again, if you are going back to Paris kindly to remind His Majesty that I am still here and would like to return to court. There are a number of us here and he seems to have forgotten us. Myself, Monsieur Archimedes, Molière, and the very gracious English lady, Cobb ...’

A door closed somewhere and before Littlejohn could question him further, Richelieu put his finger over his lips, said ‘Remember’, and crept away.

Room 14

‘WE WILL NOT detain you further, matron.’

Mlle. Petitmaître looked as if she hadn’t heard aright.

‘I beg your pardon.’

‘We will interview Nurse Hodler alone.’

‘This is ... this is highly irregular, to say the least of it.’

‘I don’t see why.’

‘Very well.’

She stalked from the room with as much dignity as she could muster, head high, nostrils dilated. It was obvious that her next port of call would be the office of Dr. Fauconnet to report the affront.

‘Please sit down, nurse.’

Nurse Hodler was around thirty, dark and good looking, with large eyes and full lips. She was obviously enjoying the discomfiture of the matron. She was quite undismayed by the presence of the police, looked Lindemann straight in the eyes and, as he cleared his throat and put on, as best he could, his official manner, she enjoyed his slight awkwardness, too.

No name, date and place of birth this time!

‘You have been at this clinic how long?’

‘Three years.’

‘And before that?’

‘Le Bon Pasteur, Zürich, for eight years.’

‘You are a close friend of Nurse Durand.’

‘Yes.’

‘For how long?’

‘Three years.’

Lindemann cleared his throat again. Then he glanced at Littlejohn to see if the Superintendent approved his method of attack.

Littlejohn had his back to them and was looking through the window. The sun had gone down over Geneva, dark was rapidly gathering and the pavilions and châlets in the grounds were showing lights. All details of the surrounding hills were gone and they stood out etched in masses on the skyline.

‘Have you seen her recently?’

‘No. I have not been allowed to do so.’

‘We will return to that later. Has the conduct of Nurse Durand been in any way unusual lately?’

Nurse Hodler gave him a strange, almost feline smile, as though she knew something and was going to make Lindemann work hard to get at it.

‘I don’t quite understand the question, sir.’

Lindemann sighed. He too knew that all this might be difficult.

‘Let us be quite candid then. For some time Nurse Durand has been friendly with a certain Alec Cling, an Englishman. Cling was killed in Geneva a few days ago. The day following his death, Nurse Durand took an overdose of sleeping tablets. It would seem that the reason for this attempted suicide was that Cling had either betrayed her in some way, or that his death had come as a bitter blow to her.’

‘I knew of his death, but nothing of his betraying her. May I ask what all that is about?’

She spoke in a well-bred quiet voice. She had obviously been well educated and trained.

‘You can take my word for it that circumstances seem to indicate that Cling was about to leave for America without her.’

‘I knew nothing of it and I doubt if she did. She left for Geneva last Thursday in quite a happy frame of mind. She returned apparently early the following morning. I came on duty at nine on the same morning and heard then that she had taken an overdose of sleeping tablets. I was amazed, for she had intended leaving *Les Plaisances* for good ...’

‘How did you know that?’

Nurse Hodler looked troubled.

‘This is in strictest confidence. The doctor and matron knew nothing about it. She had arranged to elope with Cling. I don’t know where they were going, but she didn’t plan to return to *Les Plaisances*. She took a case with her immediate requirements in it and I promised to send on the things she had left behind when she was able to let me know where to address them.’

‘Let us return to Cling. Did Nurse Durand confide in you about him?’

‘Yes. They first met a little more than a year ago. Then they met again, more frequently and by arrangement, in Geneva. He seemed to have taken a fancy to her from the beginning.’

‘They became lovers?’

‘It is no use beating about the bush, sir. They did. She told me so.’

‘Did you ever meet Cling?’

‘Yes. Once when Nurse Durand and I spent a day in Geneva. He joined us in a café. She said she would like me to know him.’

‘What did you think of Cling?’

‘Not much. I didn’t trust him. He didn’t talk much and what he did say gave one no idea of what he was thinking or intending. All the same, Albertine seemed smitten on him. I think she would have done anything for him.’

‘What brought Cling here, in the first place? This is a remote and unusual spot in which to meet anyone and start a love affair.’

Nurse Hodler’s eyes sparkled and she gave Lindemann another straight look.

‘No place is too strange for that kind of thing.’

Lindemann flushed a little and carefully looked in Littlejohn’s direction to see how he’d taken that thrust. Littlejohn was still looking out into the night.

‘You haven’t answered my question.’

‘I cannot. I don’t know what brought him here. He arrived one day and asked for Nurse Durand. It was highly irregular. The staff are not allowed visitors here. They usually meet their friends in Rolle.’

‘And Nurse Durand never confided in you the reasons for Cling’s first visit?’

‘No.’

‘You have no grounds for thinking that Cling knew Nurse Durand before he first visited *Les Plaisances*?’

‘No.’

‘Or why there should be any link between this place and Cling’s death?’

‘Certainly not. I have no idea whatever.’

She wasn’t looking quite so confident or self-possessed now. As though sooner or later some question might get below her guard.

‘Do you think Nurse Durand killed Cling because he had betrayed her?’

This time Nurse Hodler seemed completely taken aback.

‘The very suggestion is ridiculous. Of course she didn’t kill Cling. She thought the world of him.’

‘Thinking the world of him might not have prevented her killing him if her love suddenly turned to hate.’

‘She wasn’t the sort who, would kill anyone ...’

Nurse Hodler spoke every word precisely and seemed to underline it.

‘She is the kindest woman in the world and detests violence of any kind. Ask any of the patients. She is a dedicated nurse who deliberately chose her career.’

Lindemann turned to Littlejohn.

‘Are there any questions you would like to ask, sir?’

Littlejohn turned and sat with the other two. His casual unofficial manner seemed to relieve Nurse Hodler. She grew more relaxed and comfortable right away.

‘Who is the man who calls himself Richelieu, Nurse Hodler?’

She seemed surprised, as though the question were a strange one in the circumstances.

‘That is M. Raimond. He is the owner of Raimond’s Soft Drinks Company. You see their posters on all the hoardings. He broke down through overwork and now seems recovered except that he can’t stop believing he’s Cardinal Richelieu.’

‘As we entered the clinic, he asked us to engineer his release.’

‘He asks everyone. Did he ask you to do your best also to obtain the release of certain of his friends?’

‘Yes. Among others, he mentioned a certain gracious English lady named Cobb.’

‘Yes. Mrs. Cobb. She is here, too. She is a permanent resident. One of Nurse Durand’s patients, by the way.’

Lindemann opened his eyes wide. The English detective seemed suddenly to have become a catalyst, opening new avenues of enquiry. He looked ready to intervene and then changed his mind.

‘Tell us more about Mrs. Cobb.’

‘I know very little except that she is a charming old lady. She is the grandmother of a prominent doctor’s wife who lives at Ferney-Voltaire and I believe, her family is very high-ranking in England. Her son is in the government.’

‘What is her complaint?’

‘Old age, to tell the truth. This clinic specialises, among other things, in care of the senile. Mrs. Cobb suffers at times from senile dementia.’

‘I see. And now, about Nurse Durand. Have you seen her since she returned?’

‘No. It is forbidden. She is said to be unfit for visiting or conversation.’

‘Said to be? You seem to doubt it. You don’t believe she is unfit to be seen?’

Nurse Hodler looked very uneasy. She eyed the two doors of the room and lowered her voice.

‘It is as much as my job is worth to give information of this kind, but Nurse Durand is my best friend. I believe she is conscious and lucid.’

‘Why?’

‘You had better ask Dr. Fauconnet that. I think Nurse Durand is in possession of information which the doctor does not wish her to divulge. That is all.’

‘What kind of information?’

‘Either Nurse Durand has committed an indiscretion which might do *Les Plaisances* no good if it came out. Or, she has communicated some information to the outside which could damage the reputation of the clinic.’

‘Such as ...?’

‘This is a mental clinic. Many strange things naturally go on here. I don’t suggest anything illegal, but *Les Plaisances* has an excellent and world-wide reputation. The medical staff, who own it, would move heaven and earth to retain it.’

‘What gives rise to your suspicions?’

‘I have said enough. More than is good for me. You must see Dr. Fauconnet. And don’t, I beg you, so much as breathe the idea that I have suggested that Nurse Durand is being held against her will or vilifying the clinic. This is a good place and is well and honestly run.’

‘Tell me why you think Nurse Durand is lucid and conscious.’

‘She is in the private wing, where visitors are not allowed.’

‘Where the difficult patients are housed?’

Nurse Hodler merely nodded.

‘Locked and windows barred?’

‘By no means like a prison. The rooms are very comfortable indeed and the occupants are very kindly and thoughtfully treated. There are no bars, of course. The windows are of plate glass, that’s all.’

‘Nurse Durand might, however, still be semi-conscious there.’

‘Semi-conscious, yet eating chicken salad and fruit? I have seen them going to her room. A colleague who, knowing my friendship with Nurse Durand, made enquiries about her, told me where she had been moved to. That was the first time I had heard of it. Yesterday, I went to the private

wing to enquire myself. The food was just being served ... But I have said more than enough. Have you finished with me?’

Lindemann nodded and Littlejohn rose.

‘Yes, thank you, nurse. You may go now.’

Miss Hodler left the room far less self-assured than when she entered.

Matron returned by the same door. She must have been waiting in the corridor trying to make out what was going on. Probably Nurse Hodler would be questioned later.

Mlle. Petitmaître was almost immediately followed by a newcomer. A round, spruce, urbane little man in a black jacket and striped trousers. He was very dark and his black bushy eyebrows met over his nose. He was bald on top and his hair was brushed over from one side to conceal it. He shook hands with Lindemann who, in turn, introduced him to Littlejohn.

‘Dr. Binger, the director of *Les Plaisances* ... Superintendent Littlejohn, of Scotland Yard, London ...’

‘I have just returned from Paris ...’

Dr. Binger mechanically placed his hand over his heart and panted a little, as though he had run all the way.

‘... and I find this incredible inquisition going on. What is it all about?’

Lindemann very briefly explained the situation. It was obvious that Dr. Binger knew all about it, probably from Dr. Fauconnet.

‘... Inquisition is probably the right word, doctor. We are unable to obtain co-operation from your staff.’

Dr. Binger threw up his hands. He wore round gold-framed spectacles which shone and flashed as he moved his head here and there like a startled bird.

‘I would have been delighted to meet you both in different circumstances, I assure you. This affair has evidently assumed international proportions and Dr. Fauconnet, who deputised for me during my absence, is most upset. Your mention of lack of co-operation is absurd. You know we are always reasonably prepared to assist the police. What is the matter?’

‘We wish to interview Nurse Durand as soon as possible. This is a murder case and time is important. Is she or is she not in a position to speak with us?’

‘She must be kept quiet and undisturbed.’

‘She is in her own room?’

‘Er ... no. She is in a quiet part of the clinic to rest her nerves. She has suffered a severe shock.’

‘I must ask you to let us see her.’

‘That is not possible. To upset her now would be very dangerous.’

‘I am prepared to accept your medical ruling, but you must permit us, at least to see her. If, then, you say she is still unable to answer a few quiet questions, we will do as you ask and leave.’

Dr. Binger frowned. He was thinking hard.

‘Very well. But I warn you, I will not have any conversation which might disturb her. Follow me ...’

On the way, they picked up a furious Dr. Fauconnet. She did not even speak to them, but trailed along behind them like a guard cutting off their line of retreat.

They traversed a long corridor, Dr. Binger bouncing along like a large indiarubber ball. Then they took a lift up two floors. The journey was made in complete silence as though they were going to face a firing-squad.

Another long corridor, this time with a row of numbered doors on each side of it. They stopped at Number 14, and only then did Dr. Binger speak again.

‘You have been warned.’

Then he tapped on the panel. The sounds of a bolt being drawn and the door was slowly opened. A female orderly put her head round it. She opened the door wider and stood aside to allow them to enter.

A small room with a broad window and comfortable but utilitarian furnishings. The curtains had been drawn. There was a neat wooden bed instead of the standard hospital one and a figure lying in it. A woman’s face showed above the sheets. She was asleep. Littlejohn recognised her mainly by the lock of grey in front set off by the rest of her dark hair.

Lindemann crossed to the bed, followed by Littlejohn. They both looked closely at the sleeping woman. Littlejohn spoke first.

‘She has been given an injection to make her sleep? How long ago?’

The orderly cast panic-stricken eyes in the direction of Dr. Binger, who, in turn, raised his eyebrows at Dr. Fauconnet.

‘The usual sedation at bedtime,’ said Dr. Fauconnet.

‘I said how long ago.’

‘Half an hour or thereabouts.’

‘Given after our arrival to prevent our interviewing her?’

‘I resent the implication ...’

Lindemann seemed to make up his mind all at once.

‘Would you mind, Superintendent Littlejohn, remaining here with the patient. I have a telephone call to make. I shall be obliged, Dr. Binger, if you will lead me to an instrument.’

Dr. Binger’s eyes grew small and angry.

‘May I ask for what purpose?’

‘I am calling Geneva to ask them to send the police doctor and a mental expert. They will examine the patient and decide whether or not to remove her from your clinic ...’

‘But ...’

‘I have made up my mind.’

And in a quieter voice he added.

‘You have detained us here far longer than necessary and we have missed our dinner. Kindly arrange for some wine and sandwiches to be brought to us.’

Whether or not Lindemann and Dr. Binger continued their various arguments on the way to a telephone Littlejohn did not know but supper arrived, followed considerably later by two experts from Geneva.

Strange Behaviour of Dr. Fauconnet

THE TWO DOCTORS from Geneva arrived late. The police consultant, Dr. Otto Bott, was in evening dress, disturbed during a visit to a gala performance at the opera. The other, Dr. Dumelin-Graf, the distinguished psychiatrist, had a black eye, concealed by dark glasses, for one of his patients had attacked him earlier in the day.

Both specialists declared, after carefully examining Nurse Durand from head to foot, and administering various injections and manipulations, that she seemed perfectly normal and well after her recent ordeal and could answer police questions within reason when she awoke. Both added that she had better be allowed to sleep off the somewhat copious sedation given to her on Dr. Fauconnet's orders.

'Questioned with reason. You understand,' said Professor Dumelin-Graf.

Lindemann said he did, in spite of the fact that he didn't, and he took Dr. Otto Bott aside for a conference.

Dr. Bott was a kindly man who wore a beard and looked like Kaiser Wilhelm II after his flight into Holland.

'I would be glad if you and the professor would stay whilst we question Nurse Durand. The situation is very delicate. We suspect that she has been held here under duress for several days.'

Dr. Bott recoiled for many reasons. He didn't, in the first place, relish camping at *Les Plaisances* until the patient awoke.

'My dear fellow! Dr. Binger is above reproach. He has an international reputation.'

Dr. Bott didn't say what the reputation was for, but evidently assumed that it covered every type of conduct. Lindemann thought grimly, for sense of humour wasn't his strong point, that he himself could produce from the city gaols quite a number of international celebrities, too.

'Dr. Binger was absent in Paris whilst this affair was boiling up. Dr. Fauconnet, his deputy, was in charge.'

'Ah! That's different. All the same, I would like to consult with my colleague about it. Excuse me.'

And he took Professor Dumelin-Graf, who was tall, thin, eagle-faced and elegant, aside for a consultation. The discussion didn't seem to go at all

well. In fact, the professor took up his overcoat and began to put it on, as though to emphasise a point he was making. Bott returned to Lindemann, like a referee trying to reconcile two sides of a case.

‘Professor Dumelin-Graf has other business to attend to. And so have I. We suggest that the patient be moved to hospital in Geneva. She is quite fit to travel by ambulance. Will that suit you?’

It was what Lindemann had been diplomatically contriving and he agreed eagerly.

‘I will tell Binger,’ said Bott.

Supported by the professor, Dr. Bott then approached Binger, who was still in attendance, making small talk with Littlejohn, with one eye on the police and the other on the medical consultants. Whilst the experts argued, Lindemann told Littlejohn what had happened.

The two doctors from Geneva soon seemed to overwhelm Dr. Binger, who protested violently at first and then, in what seemed an attack of mental exhaustion, suddenly agreed. He looked played out and his eyes were scarcely perceptible for the bags of fatigue which surrounded them. He was, by now, resigned to whatever was in store.

Dr. Fauconnet, who had previously protested about the conduct of the police and had finally left the room in anger, had not reappeared.

‘I must consult with Dr. Fauconnet,’ said Dr. Binger and went off to do it.

Meanwhile, the rest waited.

Littlejohn, throughout the tedium of all the arguments and protests, had been rather neglected. He began to feel like Cling must have done when, as protector of Sir Ensor Cobb, he’d found himself isolated from the affair in hand through sheer ignorance of local techniques. Lindemann hastened to apologise for his apparent courtesy. Littlejohn courteously brushed it aside. He felt he knew something more about Nurse Durand now than when they’d entered the room.

In spite of the fact that she looked somewhat strained and a bit dishevelled after her ordeal of the past few days and the final overhaul by the specialists, she was a handsome woman. She was still quietly asleep, her face framed by the white pillow and sheets and her dark hair, with the now well-known lock of white in front, gathered back over her intelligent-looking forehead. The dark shadows of fatigue and despair under her eyes accentuated her pale beauty. It was surprising that Cling had planned to

leave her in the lurch in favour of a wife who had treated him shabbily all their married life and must now obviously be a faded and middle-aged woman, with all her attraction gone.

Binger was back with Dr. Fauconnet following him. They both seemed very grave. Dr. Fauconnet looked to have been shedding tears and was crestfallen and pale. This woman who had struck Littlejohn as resembling a dry-eyed bird of prey had received a shock from somewhere which had cut her down to size.

Dr. Binger was embarrassed.

‘Dr. Fauconnet has explained her part in this matter to me and I must say that had I been present to advise her, she would have acted otherwise than she did. I will ask her to give you a full account of what has happened in the case of Nurse Durand and must crave your sympathy and understanding. Dr. Fauconnet is a very able assistant but, owing to my absence, has been overworked and overwrought.’

The detectives and medical specialists were standing about the room, with the patient sleeping peacefully in their midst, as though she didn’t care a damn about the whole rigmarole. Dr. Binger was speaking in a flat colourless voice, like a second-rate lawyer reciting a prepared brief to a jury.

Littlejohn was the first to answer.

‘Wouldn’t it be better if we adjourned to somewhere more appropriate to discuss this case? The bedside seems hardly the place.’

They all looked at him as though he’d suddenly thought of something spectacular. There was a general murmur of consent. Dr. Bott seemed about to cross the room and wring Littlejohn by the hand for thinking of it, and then changed his mind.

Binger assented vigorously.

‘We’ll adjourn to my room.’

They all followed him like many sheep.

Binger’s room was impressive. A huge window on one side with dark curtains drawn. On the other three sides, books on shelves from floor to ceiling. He ought to have been more clever than he looked if he’d read them all! A large, unintelligible abstract painting over the fireplace. A number of expensive chairs and tables scattered about; filing cabinets and standard lamps. In one corner, a huge desk, dramatically illuminated by a single, soft-glowing lamp which cast a ring of light over it. Then, a heavy padded

chair, in which Binger seated himself, like a king taking the throne at a meeting of his council.

‘Be seated, all of you.’

They all obeyed and drew chairs from the shadows and seated themselves around the desk. Only Dr. Fauconnet remained standing. She seemed in a daze and wondering what to do next.

‘Come along, Chantal. Find yourself a seat.’

There was a chair beside the desk, probably for the use of patients, and the familiar sound of her Christian name, which Dr. Binger must have used when he wished to coax or mollify her, persuaded her to take it and subside in it, like a guilty party waiting for sentence.

‘I do not propose to take any notes at this stage. Later, I will require a signed statement covering what is said.’

Lindemann then seated himself, as though greatly relieved by getting his official statement off his chest.

‘Tell the company what you told me.’

Dr. Fauconnet looked anxiously at the circle of surrounding faces. Professor Dumelin-Graf removed his dark glasses, rubbed his black eye as though it irritated him, and said he hoped it wouldn’t take long as he had other work yet to do in Geneva.

‘I did what I thought was best ...’

‘I’m sure you did. Proceed.’

Dr. Binger clasped his hands and put his elbows on his desk as though about to open the proceedings with a word of prayer.

‘Shall I begin at the beginning? About the jewellery ...?’

‘Of course.’

‘We have here a patient, Mrs. Cobb. She is very wealthy and is the mother of an English cabinet minister. She is, in a sense, a voluntary patient. She suffers from senile dementia and her family think it best she remain a permanent guest, as we specialise in such cases.’

Dr. Binger nodded to underline the last statement.

‘She has jewellery worth many thousand pounds with her here. I was told it is valued at over £20,000.’

Dr. Bott hissed with surprise and as nobody else seemed inclined to interrupt the narrative, Littlejohn did so.

‘By whom?’

‘Sir Ensor Cobb himself told me. His mother was wearing the jewellery when she arrived at the clinic ...’

‘Indeed!’

‘Yes. She refuses to part with it, as it is a main delusion of her complaint that someone is trying to steal it from her.’

‘What does the jewellery consist of?’

‘A necklace, two rings, a pair of ear clips and a brooch. All in fine diamonds.’

Binger threw up his hands which, in the strange soft light of his desk and the solitary standard lamp beside it, cast strange fluttering shadows on the far wall.

‘I protested when she arrived with them,’ he said. ‘But Sir Ensor seemed resigned to leaving the jewels with her. He said they had been a part of her since his father bought them for her on the occasion of her silver wedding. They had been kept in a private safe at home and she insisted on bringing them here. Had they refused, she would have declined to come. She thinks the clinic is merely a hotel. We have never tried to convince her otherwise.’

‘Did you keep them in a safe when she wasn’t wearing them?’

‘No, Superintendent Littlejohn. She would not give them up. When we gently attempted to remove them, she went into an hysterical fit, so we couldn’t insist. Sir Ensor, who was present at the time – he had just brought her to us – gave instructions that she must keep them with her. In fact, he wrote me a letter on the spot, absolving me from responsibility or blame in case of accident or loss. He said he would arrange matters with the insurance company.’

Professor Dumelin-Graf was growing impatient again. His hands fluttered in gesticulation adding further characters to the shadow-show on the wall opposite Dr. Binger.

‘What has all this to do with the case of Nurse Durand?’

‘Nurse Durand was Mrs. Cobb’s personal attendant. It was her duty to see that the jewels were safely placed in their case when Mrs. Cobb removed them and lock them in a drawer in Mrs. Cobb’s room. Mrs. Cobb kept the key of the drawer on a ribbon round her neck.’

Lindemann suddenly spoke as though he’d received a startling revelation.

‘And the jewels were stolen!’

A pause. Then Dr. Fauconnet spoke so softly that they could hardly hear what she was saying.

‘They were.’

‘By Nurse Durand.’

‘I don’t know. She denied it.’

‘So you *have* questioned her?’

‘Please allow me to go on with my story seriatim. I’m getting mixed up. I have been unable to sleep except with the help of sedatives since it happened and my mind is confused.’

‘Proceed in your own way, then.’

‘On Thursday evening last, Mrs. Cobb awoke and got up from bed to make sure her jewellery was safe. It was a fad, a habit of hers, and we permitted it. It did her no harm. In fact it pacified her. This time however, the jewellery was missing. So was Nurse Durand. Mrs. Cobb was so overcome that she had one of her attacks and has since been under mild sedation.’

‘I suppose that kept her quiet for the time being, in the same way that Nurse Durand has been controlled,’ said Lindemann icily.

‘Yes. She ceased to worry much about her loss.’

Dr. Fauconnet said it casually, as though it were quite a habit in the clinic.

‘You informed the police?’

‘No. We wished to make a thorough search before making the loss known. To add to the confusion, Nurse Durand could not be found and when I enquired as to her whereabouts, I was told she had left the clinic earlier in the day carrying a suitcase. When I went to her room, I found that most of the things had gone. I assumed that she had stolen the jewellery and fled, although I was loath to put the blame on her in view of her faithful service here over many years, and her blameless record. It *must* have been someone inside the clinic or who knew the geography of the place very well. Mrs. Cobb’s room is difficult of access from the outside and, besides, the window was fastened on the inside, as we have conditioned air for ventilation. You will appreciate my position. I had never been faced with such a situation before and Dr. Binger was absent in Paris ...’

Lindemann interrupted again.

‘So, you kept Mrs. Cobb quiet for a day or two, hoping the stolen property would turn up before you were forced to advise the police and Sir

Ensor Cobb. And then Miss Durand returned. Why was that and what did she have to say?’

‘She told a long and confused story about a man called Cling. It all sounded fantastic to me.’

‘Tell us, all the same.’

‘I think I ought to point out, in Nurse Durand’s defence, that she returned to the clinic on the morning after you say the man Cling was found shot in Geneva. She evidently had arranged to meet him there and together they were going to ... England, I think she said. He did not arrive and she seems to have spent the night in wandering about the city. Then, when the first newspapers appeared, she read about his death. She then returned here. One of her colleagues told her I wanted to see her at once and that Mrs. Cobb’s jewellery had been stolen. She then apparently went to her room and took a lethal dose of sleeping pills. Fortunately, her colleague told me of her arrival, I hurried to her, and was in time to save the situation.’

‘Did she speak of Cling after her recovery?’

‘She has since been alternately excited and depressed. She has made a number of almost demented statements to me ...’

‘This is absolutely preposterous! You have presumably kept Nurse Durand under sedation and extracted information from her in a manner which the police themselves would only do in extreme circumstances. You have taken the law into your own hands ...’

‘But, Inspector Lindemann, I had to do something to find the lost jewels. It might have meant ruin for us all if a scandal had arisen.’

‘We will discuss that later. What did Nurse Durand disclose?’

It was obvious that Dr. Fauconnet, with the cruel eyes, alone could tell all that had occurred and that they were only going to learn what she wished to tell them.

‘It was quite a simple statement. She had, it seems, been the mistress of the man Cling for quite a long time. About a year, actually. When he returned to Geneva this year, he suggested they should go away together to England and be married. Nurse Durand had wished to give Dr. Binger proper notice of her position and resign. Cling, however, had insisted on what might be called an elopement. It appears that he was already married, but hoped to obtain a divorce. Until then, he had urged that discretion would be necessary. Nurse Durand was a rather gullible woman; she seems to have fallen in with Cling’s suggestion.’

‘Did Cling visit the clinic on the day of the robbery?’

‘It seems he did, and most irregularly. He arrived in the early afternoon with a message for Mrs. Cobb from her son, with whom Cling was attending a conference in Geneva. He asked for Nurse Durand, who took him to Mrs. Cobb’s room. This must have been done by a side entrance, as nobody else seems to have seen him. Nurse Durand left him with Mrs. Cobb for a very short time. She was, it appears, having her hair dressed by the hairdresser in her bathroom and her jewellery was in its usual place in the drawer. I asked Mrs. Cobb later why he called and what he did whilst with her. She was in such a state that she didn’t remember anything, but I assume it was then he took away the diamonds. The key of the drawer was a simple one. There are many like it. Opening the drawer would present no difficulty.’

‘Did Nurse Durand tell you whether or not Cling had obtained information from her about Mrs. Cobb’s routine?’

‘Yes, Inspector. She had told him, in discussing her work from time to time. She said he never seemed particularly interested in the jewellery. He must have been a patient and cunning man.’

‘We can assure you, he was.’

‘It seems to me that he had used Nurse Durand as a dupe to further his plan to steal the jewellery and then deserted her when he had obtained it.’

A tap on the door and an orderly appeared.

‘As instructed, Dr. Binger, I have to report that Miss Durand is now awake.’

Dr. Binger rose and rubbed his hands as though well satisfied.

‘We will adjourn now to Nurse Durand’s room, if you are agreeable, gentlemen ...’

They all rose to go except Professor Dumelin-Graf, who remained slumped in his chair. He had fallen asleep.

Albertine Durand

NURSE DURAND was sitting up in bed, obviously prepared for her visitors. Awake, she was even more attractive. Her features were now embellished by clear blue eyes. If Cling had chosen to steal the jewellery and levant to America and join his ageing ex-prostitute wife at the expense of Albertine Durand, he must have been a madman.

The patient was quite tranquil, probably with the help of still more drugs. Before she could be questioned, they were treated to a little scene between the eminent consultants. These made a hasty examination of Nurse Durand and declared she was quite fit to answer questions, provided they were not too exciting. Dr. Bott would have stayed longer; in fact, he seemed quite charmed by the lady in the bed. But Professor Dumelin-Graf would have none of it. He grew querulous at the very suggestion.

‘Whatever you decide to do, Bott, I am returning to Geneva at once. It is well past two in the morning and I have a busy day to follow. We travelled in my car and I’m now going home in it. You can make your own arrangements if you like. I wish you all good-bye.’

Dr. Bott pattered across the room to the door and took his colleague by the arms as though about to restrain him by force.

‘Don’t you think it is our duty to stay until the interview is over?’

‘No. The clinic has several doctors of its own. Nothing can possibly happen with which they cannot cope. Please excuse me. Kindly see me to the door, Dr. Binger.’

Dr. Bott’s nether lip trembled, he hesitated, shook hands all round, shrugged his shoulders and followed the professor. It looked as if they might be in for rather a strained journey home.

Those remaining gathered round Nurse Durand’s bed. Dr. Binger hastily returned and thought it was due to him to make some kind of preliminary speech. He told Nurse Durand that the police were anxious to ask questions which might lead to the capture of Cling’s murderer. The way he pronounced the word ‘Cling’ sounded like a hammer striking an anvil.

Nurse Durand seemed unimpressed, shrugged her shoulders and pouted. Maybe, in all the circumstances, she thought the killer had done her a favour.

‘This is Chief Inspector Lindemann, of the Geneva police. He is in charge of the case and will interrogate you briefly.’

Still no reaction.

‘And this is Superintendent Littlejohn, of Scotland Yard, London, who was a colleague of the dead man and is anxious to assist ...’

Nurse Durand showed interest for the first time. She spoke suddenly.

‘You knew Alec Cling. He was a scoundrel! He was not only a traitor to me, he was also a traitor to you. He hated Scotland Yard. He had not received the promotion he thought was due to him and poured scorn on Scotland Yard and all his colleagues whenever he could. It is my wish to assist Scotland Yard all I can to recover the property of poor Mrs. Cobb. You may ask me any questions you like.’

They all seemed surprised at this sudden *volte-face*. Lindemann stepped back from the bed and, with a gentle pat on his shoulder, thrust Littlejohn forward.

‘Carry on, sir.’

‘Had Cling any enemies? I take it that during the time you knew him he confided in you frequently.’

‘Never. He was a man who never told anyone much in the way of personal secrets. It was only at the end of more than a year’s acquaintance that he told me that he was married. And that was to excuse our getting married before we left for England. That was his idea. We should elope to England and would marry when he had been able to obtain a divorce.’

‘Did he then tell you anything about his wife?’

‘No. He said he preferred not to dwell on past unhappiness.’

‘Was Cling afraid of anything? Did he seem suspicious or circumspect about anything?’

‘He was always circumspect and, as far as I know, he was not afraid of anything or anybody.’

It was a wonder, in view of the picture Nurse Durand was painting of Cling, that she had ever wasted any love on him. Now, her love had turned to hatred for some reason and he was a monster.

‘How long did you know Cling?’

‘A little over a year. He called here with a message for Mrs. Cobb, we talked for a while after he had left her, and he suggested that we meet some time in Geneva. One thing led to another ...’

‘He seemed to know Geneva very well. I believe he had a kind of regular *pied à terre* there.’

‘He had been to Geneva quite frequently with various people on conferences. As for the room in Rue Jacobi; it was not a permanent place. He booked it intermittently. He said it was best, in his occupation, to be away from the large hotels and have a quiet room where he could keep his things and retire when he had confidential work to do.’

‘You say you were going to England?’

‘Yes. He said he had matters to square up there and then we would decide the future when he’d settled them.’

‘Did he ever mention going to America?’

‘America? Never. Why?’

‘He had connections in America ...’

‘His wife?’

‘Yes. You were nurse in charge of Mrs. Cobb?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did she have many visitors?’

‘Not many. Her granddaughter, who lives at Ferney, and her husband, Dr. Vincent, came about once a fortnight. Sir Ensor Cobb would call whenever he was in Geneva.’

‘Only then?’

‘He might have made a special journey now and then. Also, Miss Halston, Sir Ensor’s secretary, came sometimes. She would stay here in the guests’ châlet for a day or two and attend to anything Mrs. Cobb wished. Now and then, Mr. Bellin, Sir Ensor’s confidential man-of-affairs visited her, too. That was when she had business matters to attend to. He was always very attentive and very interested in what she was doing and how she fared.’

‘Had either of them – Miss Halston or Mr. Bellin – been here lately?’

‘They were both here last week, just before Alec Cling died. It was merely a social call, as they were in Geneva with Sir Ensor, attending a conference.’

Littlejohn paused. He could hardly think what to ask next. They’d been there seven hours, much of it in boring waiting in stuffy rooms dimly lighted, accumulating a lot of confusing information, much of it probably quite superfluous. All around was complete silence. Littlejohn didn’t know

how many occupants there were in the clinic, but they seemed to be a quiet lot.

‘Will that be all? The patient must be getting fatigued. I think we had better bring the interrogation to a close.’

Dr. Binger spoke in a husky voice. He seemed exhausted, too, and a look of great anxiety had spread over his face as though something might come to light which would ruin him and the reputation of his nursing-home.

Dr. Fauconnet stood by Binger’s side, like a faithful attendant. She had recovered her poise and now looked as fresh as ever. If it could be described as fresh. Her energy seemed concentrated in her hooded eyes which missed nothing. She gave her closest attention to all that was said. Now and then her lips pursed into a thin line as question and answer seemed to concern matters she thought should be kept secret within the walls of the clinic.

‘Before we leave, Miss Durand, I would like you just to tell me, if you will, the arrangements on the day Cling met his death.’

‘You mean what I did and what Cling did?’

‘That’s right ...’

Littlejohn had been speaking French for so long that now he was seized with a great nostalgia for English again. It might have been the circumstances, the tension and the gloom of the night that affected him. Somehow he associated his own language with the fresh air and felt he’d had enough strain for one evening.

‘We were to meet in Geneva for the night plane to London. I left the clinic at about 3.30. Before I went, I opened the drawer to see if the diamonds were safe. Mrs. Cobb was with the hairdresser, the key of the drawer was on her bedside table. I had a presentiment, somehow, about the jewellery. I don’t know why, but I thought Alec Cling might have taken them. The diamonds had gone! I couldn’t do anything about it at the time. It would have upset all our plans. Our rendezvous was the restaurant in the Jardin Anglais at the head of the lake. Eight o’clock. Cling did not arrive. I waited until nine. I had a feeling of great apprehension. In the first place, I had to ask him if he had taken Mrs. Cobb’s jewellery. If he had done, I was determined not to leave with him until they had been replaced. Mrs. Cobb had been my patient for a number of years – ever since she arrived at the clinic. I knew her attachment to her diamonds and was sure that their loss would cause a nervous crisis from which she would probably not recover. I felt it my duty to put matters right.’

‘And if Cling had confessed to taking the property but refused to restore it. What then?’

‘I had fully made up my mind not to leave with him. I had thought myself in love with him. It must have been mere infatuation, for, as soon as I discovered that he had taken the jewels, I hated him. Nevertheless, I thought that if he loved me, he would be sure to make a bargain and restore them, on condition that I went with him. Instead, he was killed. I am certain he had the jewellery and that he was murdered and robbed because of it.’

‘You are sure you did not meet him and quarrel with him?’

‘You think it was I who killed him. I could willingly have done so when I discovered that he had tricked me. But I did not murder him. That I swear. The very thought of killing him with a heavy fire extinguisher makes me shudder. It is a nightmare.’

She put her hands to her face as though to shut out the sight of it.

‘How do you know he was killed that way?’

‘Dr. Fauconnet told me. She showed me the newspapers with accounts of the enquiry.’

Littlejohn turned to Dr. Fauconnet, who looked him calmly in the eyes.

‘How did you come to give her all this information, when you know her nervous condition?’

‘It was my opinion that it would do no harm for her to know the truth. I felt it would release her from the anxiety of not knowing where Cling was.’

‘I see. You seem to have made a thorough job of brainwashing Nurse Durand.’

‘I *beg* your pardon. I resent the expression.’

‘We will discuss that later.’

He turned to Nurse Durand.

‘You were telling me of your movements ... You waited at the restaurant until nine. What then?’

‘I didn’t know what to do next. I walked round Geneva and then back to the restaurant. He was not there. Then I took a taxi to Cointrin Airport and waited there until the night plane left for London. He was not on it. I returned to the city and spent some time on the Cornavin station. I had lost count of time and was so exhausted that I didn’t know where I was. Then, the first morning papers arrived and I saw that he was dead. I did not even feel sorry for him. I realised that I had been his dupe in robbing Mrs. Cobb. I had a vague idea that I might be able to assist in recovering her jewellery

for her. I determined to return and tell Dr. Fauconnet what I knew; about Cling's visit earlier in the previous day, his story about bringing a message from Sir Ensor, and his being alone in Mrs. Cobb's room, after which the jewels vanished.'

'You didn't do that?'

'No. When I got back here, I quietly went to my room and thought what I had better do. In the peace of familiar places, I saw matters differently. I would certainly be accused of being Cling's accomplice and perhaps of killing him. I felt completely trapped. So, I ...'

'You tried to find a quick way out. You have told this story to Dr. Fauconnet already?'

'Yes. She questioned me and said it would be all right.'

'She questioned you under drugs?'

Binger almost exploded.

'I protest! Neither of us would do anything so immoral. We have our code of ethics in this place. We are doctors and know how to behave ourselves.'

'Does Dr. Fauconnet say the same?'

Dr. Fauconnet bared her even white teeth in a grimace.

'Of course I say the same. In a case like this, one is bound to use sedatives. That is all I did.'

'Very well. Your behaviour seems to have departed somewhat from the medical and infringed that of the police.'

Lindemann nodded vigorously.

'And what do you propose to do about it?'

Dr. Fauconnet's temper was rising. Binger stretched out a hand to placate her.

'Not here, please, doctor.'

Lindemann answered Dr. Fauconnet's question straight to the point.

'The matter will be reported to the cantonal medical board and the customary periodic inspection will be conducted in this clinic with much more rigour than usual!'

'I think that will be all, Miss Durand, thank you. I'm sorry to trouble you at this time of night, but you have been most helpful ...'

Littlejohn drew the sheets up to her chin and gave her a pleasant smile.

'I hope I'm not, in turn, stepping into the medical ground, but I wish you goodnight and a good sleep.'

He turned to Binger, who was perspiring heavily.

‘And now, Dr. Binger, could we talk again in your office?’

‘It is late and we have early duties ...’

‘We won’t keep you long.’

Back through the dimly lighted corridors, down the lift, and once again the padded door of Dr. Binger’s den.

On the way back Littlejohn and Lindemann held a brief conversation. Dr. Fauconnet followed the rest into the study. She had recovered her aplomb and her eyes never left Dr. Binger’s face. It was as though she thought he might crack under the strain at any time and burst into a series of indiscretions.

Dr. Binger didn’t ask them to be seated this time. Instead, he flung himself in his chair in almost a state of collapse and mopped his globular forehead.

‘Well?’

Lindemann assumed control.

‘Is Mrs. Cobb still suffering from shock?’

‘Yes.’

‘Has Sir Ensor been informed of the loss of the jewellery and his mother’s condition?’

Binger turned to Dr. Fauconnet and raised his eyebrows in question. She answered.

‘No. We did not consider her condition gave cause for any great alarm. It is the usual reaction. As for the diamonds; we had hoped to recover them ourselves with the help of Nurse Durand.’

‘In other words, you thought she had had a hand in the theft and knew where they were hidden.’

‘That is so. Now, it appears we thought wrongly.’

‘You thought wrongly all the time. Your conduct has been most reprehensible. Sir Ensor must be informed at once. The police also should have been advised right away, instead of having to find out for themselves.’

‘I will advise Sir Ensor by telephone of what has happened as soon as it is daylight.’

‘You needn’t trouble, thank you. Superintendent Littlejohn is returning to London by the early plane and will do it himself. And now, I’ll trouble you to show us to the door.’

Sleight of Hand

EXHAUSTED by the tiresome night at *Les Plaisances*, the name of which made him smile ironically, Littlejohn slept all the way back to England on the first plane from Geneva to London. He had already made an appointment with Sir Ensor Cobb and arrived at his office just before noon.

Littlejohn had not, when he telephoned from Geneva, informed the Minister of the loss of his mother's diamonds. He wished to be present and watch Sir Ensor's reaction when he broke the news. This was rather spectacular. Sir Ensor indulged in a torrent of rage quite out of keeping with his usual manner.

'Monstrous! It isn't the value of the things that troubles me, but the fact the old lady had been upset and subjected to indignity. Why wasn't I told right away?'

He paused, livid and speechless, which was something fresh for him. He behaved as though Littlejohn were responsible for it all, too. He made gestures as though cleaning chalk from a blackboard.

'I don't want excuses. It should never have happened.'

Littlejohn let him have his head for a while and blandly listened to the flow of anger until he felt he'd had quite enough.

'You yourself must take the responsibility for what has happened, Sir Ensor. You apparently approved of the jewellery being in your mother's possession and quite improperly guarded. The diamonds were kept in the drawer of a dressing-table with a lock which any fool could pick with a hairpin. The damage had been done when the police came in.'

Cobb couldn't find an answer. He cooled off and apologised.

'It was the thought of my mother alone there and losing her diamonds which seem to constitute the main joy of her old age. It isn't good enough.'

He paused.

'Excuse me. You've just arrived from Switzerland. Have you had a meal?'

'No, sir. But I'd better tell you what has happened and then leave and have lunch with a colleague I wish to instruct. I may have to return to Geneva tonight or early tomorrow.'

'You've not solved the matter yet?'

‘Far from it. This business at *Les Plaisances* has only complicated the issue. I suppose you thoroughly investigated the place before your mother was sent there, sir.’

‘Of course. It has an international reputation and is well-known and highly regarded in medical circles.’

‘So I believe. The chiefs of the medical staff there kept us awake all night trying to convince us of the integrity of their clinic.’

‘What do you mean? You aren’t insinuating that I bundled my mother and her jewellery off to a second-rate place! It was thoroughly investigated.’

‘Please, Sir Ensor, don’t get excited again. I was merely telling you how the police found them. I know nothing at all about the clinic and its work. I think I’d better start right at the beginning and tell you how matters have progressed so far. That is, if you can call it progress. Every new discovery seems to add to the confusion.’

‘Begin at the beginning, then.’

The office was unusually quiet. They could hear Big Ben faintly striking twelve but the noises of the street were silenced by the double windows and the doors were padded. Sir Ensor must have cleared the decks of intruding staff beforehand.

‘We thought at first that Cling had been shot somewhere in the precincts of the Hôtel du Roi and his body placed in the car which I’d hired and of which he’d obtained the key from the garage for some purpose of his own. I’m beginning to doubt that theory. I have an idea that Cling used the car to make a special journey somewhere and might have been killed when he arrived at his destination. He was then brought back to the Hôtel du Roi. The murderer found there, however, that all the parking space was full and left the car with the body in the only available dark place, the rose garden by the fountain, and cleared off.’

‘But why return to the Hôtel du Roi? Why not leave the body and the car where the crime was committed?’

‘Let us assume Cling and his murderer made the journey together. At the end of the outward journey, Cling was killed. The murderer had then to get back to Geneva, and used the car for the purpose. Instead of dumping the body on the way back, he just left it where it was, on the car seat, and abandoned the car. You may have noticed that the garden where the car was found is in darkness to enhance the illuminated fountain nearby. The

murderer could creep away without being seen, given a favourable opportunity.'

'That seems a funny theory to me. Why not dump the body in the lake or somewhere where it couldn't be found?'

'Perhaps time was valuable if the murderer was thinking of an alibi. We shall see. The idea struck me on the way back here and I telephoned to Lindemann, of the Swiss police, to check the mileage of the car. I must confess that since I hired it for pleasure trips, I haven't taken much notice of the miles we travelled. But I've run up a rough calculation and Lindemann can check the speedometer and find how many kilometres we can't account for. That may give us an idea of the trip Cling made after he confiscated my car.'

'I see ...'

Sir Ensor looked as if he thought it all very fantastic and impracticable.

'Go on with the rest.'

'We know that Cling was very fond of Geneva. We discovered that he had a room of his own there near Eaux-Vives. He used to take his mistress there.'

'Did he, by God! Who was she?'

'Albertine Durand, the nurse in charge of your mother.'

Sir Ensor slapped the desk with the palm of his hand.

'That's it! So, it was Cling and Durand who stole my mother's diamonds. I knew Durand quite well. I must confess I'm surprised ...'

'She denies it. She also emphatically denies that she killed Cling. She says she saw nothing of him on the night he was killed, although they had a rendezvous in Geneva. According to her, they were going to run away together.'

'With the diamonds. That's obvious.'

'Cling had no intention of taking her with him. Their flight was supposed to be to London. Actually, Cling had booked a single seat on the next plane from Zürich to Chicago. His wife lived in Chicago.'

'What a confused mess.'

'I told you it was.'

'He'd covered his tracks very well?'

'Yes. But he lost his ticket from Geneva to Zürich. It was found under the carpet of his room at *Mont-Choisi*.'

‘The girl must have discovered what he was going to do and killed him in a fit of rage.’

‘I don’t know. She doesn’t strike me as being that type. She went to the rendezvous and Cling didn’t turn up. She seems to have spent the night wandering round Geneva until the morning papers arrived and she read about Cling’s murder. She went back to the clinic, presumably because there she could obtain the necessary sleeping pills to commit suicide. She took a good dose, but before she could sleep away to death, Dr. Fauconnet found her and brought her back to life. Whereupon, in the absence of Dr. Binger who might have advised her what to do, Dr. Fauconnet placed Nurse Durand under sedation to keep her quiet.’

‘She did! I’m surprised. I always thought well of Dr. Fauconnet ...’

‘She admitted that she took that course to protect the good name of the clinic and until Dr. Binger returned to take matters over.’

‘Meanwhile, what about my mother?’

He really looked alarmed, as though they’d either hidden or murdered her, too.

‘Sedation, too. Your mother, on discovering the loss of her diamonds, suffered from what they call *une crise de nerfs*, hysteria, and they had to give her something to quieten her.’

‘Why wasn’t I told? The whole damn’ thing is outrageous! They ought to have sent for me.’

‘You’d probably have taken her away at once and the whole affair would have come to the light of day. The international reputation of *Les Plaisances* would have grown a trifle shabby after that. In any event, it was probably the correct treatment in the case.’

‘But the theft and the upset to my mother. I ought to have been advised.’

‘They were going to do so at almost three in the morning, but I said I would see you early today and give you a full account of what happened. Your mother is better and is being well cared for, you can be sure. Especially as the police now have a close eye on *Les Plaisances*. The two doctors will have a lot of explaining to do when the Cling affair is over.’

‘I should think so. I’m returning with you to Geneva ... Or wait. I can’t. I’m speaking in the House tonight. Kate Halston can go and bring my mother home. We’ll find a clinic for her here until something else can be done.’

‘I wouldn’t rush things, sir. You can be sure your mother will be properly looked after now ...’

‘No. No. I’ve made up my mind. She isn’t staying there a minute longer than I can help. Kate can take the next plane and bring her to England. But go on with your account. I’ll fix Kate’s journey when you’ve finished. Have you any idea who killed Cling?’

‘No, sir. We haven’t even sorted out the motive yet.’

‘That’s obvious. It was the diamonds. Cling planned to take them and Durand was his accomplice. They quarrelled and she killed him.’

‘That might not be very easy to prove, sir. Nurse Durand strenuously denies even having seen Cling after their meeting at the clinic on the afternoon of his death.’

‘He was there?’

‘Yes. He told Nurse Durand that he had called at your request to give a message to your mother.’

‘That was a lie. I never send messages to her in that fashion, especially by a man like Cling, whom my mother, as far as I am aware, didn’t even know.’

‘I suppose your mother knows Miss Halston and Mr. Bellin quite well.’

‘Yes. They got to know her before she left England for *Les Plaisances* and whenever they’ve been in Switzerland they’ve called to see her. She appreciates visits from her friends. But not from Cling, I’m sure.’

‘I take it you would, if Dr. Binger agreed, have no objections to my visiting and talking with your mother. She might be able to help in the investigation and I promise I would not disturb her.’

‘I’ve no objection at all, but you will have to be quick about it. As I said, I’m sending Miss Halston to Avène right away to remove my mother from *Les Plaisances*. I’ve lost confidence in Binger and his clinic and I shall find a place more suitable where they treat patients with a little more respect.’

‘You won’t forget that Dr. Binger may say it is inadvisable for your mother to travel at present.’

‘In that case, I shall ask my son-in-law in Ferney to act on my behalf.’

‘May I ask who was aware that your mother habitually wore more than twenty thousand pounds worth of jewellery every day at *Les Plaisances*?’

‘Naturally, I didn’t advertise the fact, but Miss Halston and Bellin knew, of course. I also told Binger and Miss Fauconnet. I didn’t want them to

think they were made of glass and I asked them to keep an eye on them. Binger offered to keep them in his private safe, but my mother wouldn't allow them out of her possession. My father bought them for her years ago and, as she has grown older, particularly of late, she suffers from senile dementia from time to time and she has become more and more attached to the diamonds. In fact, they have become an obsession, a part of her. I tried her with some well-made paste replicas, but she found out. Funny, one of the inmates of the clinic is an ex-jeweller from Rue de la Paix, in Paris. He was ruined during the war and went off his head. It was he who happened to meet my mother when she was wearing the imitation stones. He called them "baubles" and told her their value. She suffered one of her crises and they sent for me. I had to see to it that such a scene didn't occur again. She has worn the real stones since. After all, it is worth while to give her happiness in her old age, whatever the value.'

'Where are the imitation diamonds at present, sir?'

'In a bank in Geneva, for what they're worth. They are quite good. In fact, first class imitations and only an expert could recognise them at a glance, although rough handling would soon show they weren't diamonds.'

'Why did you put the imitations in the bank, sir?'

'The genuine articles were there and when I took them away after my mother's breakdown, I left the false stones in the box at the bank in their place, for somewhere better to keep them.'

'And the bank, sir. Which bank?'

'I don't see what that has to do with the case. However, it's Banque Ferdinand Helder, Quai des Bergues. Helder is an old friend of mine and I do business with him now and then.'

'Did Cling know of this?'

'Whatever are you getting at now? Are you thinking he might have done some kind of switch?'

'No; I'd be interested to know if he knew of your connections with Banque Helder.'

'He did. He was on my tail whenever I was about in Geneva and I called once or twice on Ferdinand Helder with Cling shadowing me. He followed me in the bank ... Yes; he was with me when I changed the false for the real pieces. We were put in a private room together whilst I did it. Of course, I didn't explain to him what I was doing.'

‘He was probably shrewd enough to guess. May I ask you if you’ll be good enough to ring the bank now and ask if the jewellery has been recently disturbed?’

‘But that’s nonsense. Who could disturb it, except me? They wouldn’t allow anyone else to get near it.’

‘All the same, would you ask? And, by the way, how is it deposited? In a sealed packet or a locked box?’

‘In a locked box. I have one key and Helder, personally, holds the other. It is a bit unusual for a banker to hold the key of a locked box in safe custody with him but Helder did this as a personal favour against my written indemnity. You see, there are documents concerning my mother there, which might have been needed urgently and also when the real stones were there, it might have become necessary to allow her to have them ... In brief, it was in case of an emergency which might occur when I couldn’t get to Geneva quickly. I might have been abroad on diplomatic duties ...’

‘I understand. Did Cling know?’

‘Really, Littlejohn, you try my patience. Cling, Cling, Cling ... It’s like the passing bell. Why should Cling want to know a matter like that?’

‘Did he?’

‘Yes. As I said, he was with me when we changed the false for the true on the occasion mentioned. Helder, my good friend, attended me personally and even opened the box with his own key.’

‘May I trouble you about the phone call?’

Sir Ensor sighed.

‘Littlejohn, you are the limit! Wait a minute. I’ll get them to use the Telex.’

‘No sir. If you please! I wish this to be private. Will you do it yourself?’

Sir Ensor thumbed the pages of his pocket diary and then lifted the telephone.

‘Geneva 42 24 77 ... Mr. Ferdinand Helder, Junior, please.’

He was through in less than a minute.

Then followed a series of friendly greetings, personal enquiries, and finally the questions asked by Littlejohn.

Sir Ensor’s face grew redder and redder and his jaw opened in astonishment as the tale went on at the other end. ‘No, no, no, Helder. Nothing wrong. I’m just ringing to ask if it happened. It has slipped my memory. That’s quite all right. Yes ... as I told you at the time, I was taking

away my mother's real diamonds and replacing them in the box by the imitations which she wore on everyday occasions. Did he take them away? No, I'm not worried. No. I'm just checking. A matter of insurance ... I'd be grateful if you would ...'

A pause, which gave Sir Ensor time for a word with Littlejohn.

'Helder is just getting the box up from the vaults. He tells me that Cling was in the bank the other week ... to be precise, on the afternoon before his death ... Can you beat that? How did you know?'

An interruption and a voice speaking in good English from the other end. Then a lot more assurances by Sir Ensor that all was well, although judging from Cobb's astonished troubled face, it wasn't. Finally, the conversation ended.

It took Cobb a second or two to recover his breath and equanimity.

'Littlejohn; the real diamonds are in the box!'

'Would Mr. Helder know the difference between genuine and false?'

'When he was young, his father sent him to De Beers to gain experience. Now he owns a string of jeweller's shops as well as a bank and ships in the Swiss mercantile marine.'

'How did it happen?'

'Cling was a cool one. He arrived as calm and collected as he always was, just before closing time on the day he died. He produced a letter on British Embassy paper, purporting to be signed by me. A perfect signature, very well-known to Helder. The letter requested the bank to allow Cling, of Scotland Yard, if you please, and identifiable by his warrant card and other credentials, to inspect the contents of the box, in particular the case containing mother's jewellery. Helder was asked, as a favour to open the box with his key and remain with Cling whilst he checked the items. The inspection, said the letter, was for insurance purposes.'

'And the bank did as they were bidden?'

'Of course. Wouldn't you? No risk. They were to stand over Cling and see he didn't pocket anything. They received a letter with an impeccable forgery on it on official note-paper. And Cling supplied all his documents and credentials. The box was produced, opened, and Helder watched him open the jewel case, count the items, and close and put it back again. Had Cling ever been a conjurer?'

'Not to my knowledge, although if he'd ever learned prestidigitation, he'd have done it properly. That was one of his strong points.'

Thoroughness.'

Quite Another Cling

'IF YOU BOTH travel to Geneva on the same plane, you and Miss Halston could perhaps call together at *Les Plaisances* to see my mother. You could also help her, maybe, to persuade the old lady to come back to England and make some arrangements for her. Sorry I can't go myself.'

It didn't seem a very attractive proposition to Littlejohn. One on which he would probably waste a lot of time. Sir Ensor had a nerve suggesting it. On the other hand, Mrs. Cobb might take to him better and be more lucid and communicative if he were in company with Miss Halston.

'Of course. That would suit me very well.'

Sir Ensor hastily summoned his secretary over the office phone. She arrived at once, as though she'd been waiting and prepared for the summons at any time. She always seemed very busy and energetic. A plain, but interesting and intelligent face, and, although she was around forty, she was still quite desirable. She dressed simply but well and in excellent taste and her figure was plump and attractive. She greeted Littlejohn as though she knew him well.

Sir Ensor gave Miss Halston a brief account of what had happened recently at *Les Plaisances*. Or, at least, he thought it was brief. Actually, it was a long rambling disjointed discourse similar to his answers to questions in the House, which often bored his questioners to tears and made them shy off anything but the extremely essential.

Kate Halston looked shocked and surprised.

'I'd no idea the Cling tragedy had reached *Les Plaisances*. Poor dear! Mrs. Cobb thought so much of her diamonds ...'

'They've been recovered.'

She grew tense and strained now.

'Have the police made an arrest, then?'

'No. But before he died, Cling put the jewellery in a safe place and we know where it is.'

She gave a relieved sigh and relaxed again.

'So, I think you'd better go to Geneva on the first possible flight and bring mother home to my place. She can stay with me until we find alternative accommodation for her.'

‘I’m astonished that such things could happen at *Les Plaisances*. We always thought they were so suitable and of good repute. Dr. Binger will be upset, I’m sure.’

‘I don’t care a damn about Binger, Kate. He was in Paris at the time, no doubt enjoying himself, and Dr. Fauconnet was left in charge. She seems to have lost her head completely and her behaviour was highly irregular, almost criminal. You can travel with Littlejohn, Kate. He’s leaving for Geneva in the late afternoon. He wishes to speak to mother so you can introduce him to her and see that she calms down. Littlejohn will help you in arranging for mother’s removal and travel. And you’re to stand no nonsense from Binger or anyone else. Tell them I say so.’

And he sat back in his chair and puffed out his chest like a king who’d signed an ultimatum.

‘Very well, Sir Ensor. Shall we meet at the airport, Superintendent? I’ve still a lot to do.’

‘Yes, Miss Halston. I’ll see you in the airport, main hall at 5.15. I suppose you’ll be able to secure a seat for yourself.’

‘She will,’ said Sir Ensor, as though there’d be an eruption if she didn’t.

‘Let’s meet in front of the Midland Bank, then.’

‘Very well.’

Sir Ensor was still ringing bells and pushing buttons.

‘Is Mr. Bellin there? Send him in, please.’

Bellin arrived promptly, casually strolled to the desk with his hands in his pockets, and joined them.

‘Hullo, Superintendent. How’s the case?’

Bellin was well set up. Smartly dressed, elegant in his blue suit and college tie. The type to be found with pretty women and gracious living in the best places. He moved energetically for a man in his middle forties, but his face betrayed his age. There were pouches of fatigue under his eyes.

‘Never mind that, Roland. Kate’s going to Geneva with Littlejohn to bring my mother home. There’s been trouble at *Les Plaisances* ...’

‘Not another murder, I hope.’

He grinned.

‘Of course not. And there’s nothing funny about it, Roland.’

Sir Ensor then repeated to Bellin, almost word for word, the tale he’d already told Miss Halston.

Bellin whistled.

‘The ruddy limit. Don’t blame you. The sooner your mother’s in safe hands the better.’

There then occurred a silence, as though they were all digesting the information and wondering how it was all going to end.

‘By the way, there’s one formality the Swiss police asked me to attend to, Sir Ensor. They wish to know where you, Miss Halston and Mr. Bellin were at the time of the crime.’

Littlejohn almost laughed outright. They all looked so stupefied.

Another pause, almost as menacing as a vacuum. Sir Ensor spoke first.

‘Ridiculous! They know that I was at their damned police dinner in full view of all the guests all the time. My alibi’s public property. Why they should bother about Kate and Roland I can’t think. They’d nothing to do with Cling’s death. Why should they? It all arose out of a sordid love affair.’

Bellin didn’t seem to mind.

‘I was at the dinner, too, for a little while. I left around eight and didn’t return until ten. I’d the day’s reports to finish. I did it in one of the private rooms. Kate saw me go and I went to consult her now and then about various matters. In a sense, we’re each other’s alibi. Aren’t we, Kate?’

There was a faint sound of challenge in his tone.

Miss Halston thought briefly as though mentally checking up the events of the night and then nodded her head.

‘Yes.’

Back at Scotland Yard, Littlejohn had a meal with Inspector Cromwell and brought him up to date with events.

Cromwell looked puzzled.

‘It’s a strange affair. Whose side was Cling playing on?’

‘I’m leaving for Geneva with Miss Halston on the evening flight, Cromwell. I’m going to see old Mrs. Cobb. We’ll see if she has anything to say which will help us. Meanwhile, I’d be glad if you’d investigate Kate Halston’s background. Special Branch should have some files which might be illuminating. But be careful. We don’t want her to know we’re interested in her. I want all that’s available about her, past and present. And the same applies to Roland Bellin, Sir Ensor’s man-of-affairs. Give him the same treatment as Miss Halston.’

‘Do you think the pair of them had a hand in the death of Cling?’

‘I don’t know. It’s only a hunch. But there seems to be some bond in common between them. The way Bellin almost bullied her into giving him

an alibi for the time of Cling's death. I might be mistaken. Bellin's a hard case. Your investigations about the pair of them might give a simple explanation. We'll see.'

A message had arrived by phone from Geneva, too. According to the information obtained from the hire firm who'd supplied Littlejohn with a car, the initial figure on the speedometer, shown in their records, deducted from the mileage finally registered, left from sixty to eighty miles unaccounted for. In ringing up his wife to explain his movements, he'd also checked his own figure with his wife and confirmed it. Cling had evidently travelled some distance in the purloined car before his murder.

At the appointed time, Littlejohn met Miss Halston at the airport. She'd succeeded in booking a seat on the Geneva flight. They boarded the plane and a meal was served. It was not until this had been cleared away and they were within half an hour's flight of Geneva that Littlejohn had any chance to speak seriously with her.

Throughout the journey she had seemed awkward and uneasy about something. It was unlikely that a sophisticated woman like Kate Halston would be nervous and gauche in the presence of a strange man. It must therefore have been that she was a bit afraid of Littlejohn and what he knew about the Cling case. He made up his mind to find out, if he could.

'The Swiss Alps should be in sight any minute, Superintendent ...'

'Yes. I wonder how we'll find Mrs. Cobb. She's been very upset of late by the disappearance of her diamonds. Where did you say you were at the time of the crime?'

'I've already told you, I was in the *Hôtel du Roi* all the time ...'

She tossed her head and turned and looked through the window beside which she was sitting.

'Please look at me. I wish to know exactly what you were doing, Miss Halston. This is important, and it will be more convenient for you, I can assure you, if you tell me frankly. If I am not told, you will have to explain it all to the Swiss police. As soon as this plane touches down, you will be within their jurisdiction, not mine. At the moment, your answer is mere routine. In Switzerland, it may be much more serious.'

He spoke to her very quietly and informally and she seemed to appreciate it.

'I'm sorry, but you must realise that I had nothing to do with Cling's death. I don't see why I should be dragged into it. However, if you must

know, I was in the *Hôtel du Roi* from the beginning of the banquet until the time when Roland Bellin sought me out at the end of the proceedings and asked me if I'd drive him and Sir Ensor home.'

'Did anyone see you; or were you with anyone all this time?'

'Of course. I didn't wander about the place on my own. I was with Marie Amiguet, one of the secretaries to the delegation of the Prefect of Paris. We have been friends for a long time. We dined together in the hotel and then went into the large hall where the police dinner was being held. We listened to the speeches until the formal proceedings ended suddenly by your arriving and sending a message to Sir Ensor about Cling's death.'

'I see. When did you see Mr. Bellin?'

'Just after the affair broke up and Sir Ensor left. Bellin asked him if there was anything we could do. Sir Ensor said no; he wished to get back to Ferney as soon as possible. The police asked a few questions of all of us and then we were allowed to go. Bellin and I went back to our hotel and I went to bed almost immediately. The following morning the police questioned all of us again, but we didn't seem able to help much.'

'Bellin told me that you were his alibi. Was that true?'

She hesitated.

'Remember, Miss Halston, you said you were with *Mlle. Amiguet* all the evening. Did Bellin join the pair of you at any time between your meeting her and his finding you later and asking you to drive them home? *Mlle. Amiguet* may be asked to confirm any such meetings.'

Kate Halston remained silent and tugged at the handle of her bag nervously.

'Listen, Miss Halston. You will be asked the question by the Swiss police and you'll have to sign a statement confirming your answer. I cannot be responsible for what will happen if you commit perjury and give a false statement. If you tell me the truth, it will be over and done with. I will embody it in my report for the Swiss police and you will not be asked the same question again. If you don't care to answer, however, Inspector Lindemann will have to deal with it.'

'Roland made the statement that I was his alibi. I didn't.'

'But you confirmed it.'

'I don't know why he said it. Is that enough?'

'No.'

‘He may have seen me several times during the evening. That’s probably what he was meaning.’

‘But you didn’t see him?’

‘No.’

‘That is all I want to know.’

‘I don’t wish to make matters awkward for Roland. It makes him appear to be a liar, or playing some trick.’

‘He will be asked the same question again. If he repeats the answer, he’ll have to substantiate it. If he was mistaken, he can rectify his statement. It doesn’t mean to say we suspect him of killing Cling. By the way, how did he and Cling get on together?’

‘They didn’t have much to do with one another. Cling was concerned with the safety of Sir Ensor, not Bellin. In any case, it was difficult to be sociable with Alec Cling. Roland didn’t really like Cling.’

‘What did you think of Cling?’

‘He was a decent enough fellow, but, as I said, he never opened up and one never knew what he was thinking or what he thought of one.’

‘Was he a ladies’ man?’

She laughed.

‘I was surprised to hear of his affair with Nurse Durand. I could never imagine him as a Don Juan. Mephistopheles, yes. But never the ageing lover. I tried to imagine when Sir Ensor told us of the affair, what he said or did to make a woman love him. He must have been a different man altogether with Nurse Durand.’

‘So she seemed to think. She tried to kill herself when he let her down.’

‘Poor Nurse Durand. I must try to see her when we get to *Les Plaisances*.’

‘You knew her well?’

‘She was in charge of Mrs. Cobb. I never missed visiting Sir Ensor’s mother whenever we were in the neighbourhood.’

‘Did Sir Ensor always go, too?’

‘Yes. He thinks a lot of his mother.’

‘Why, then, is she in a clinic so far away from home. Anything might happen.’

‘She is very fond of Dr. Fauconnet, strange as it may sound, for the doctor is a very formidable woman. But she and Mrs. Cobb seem to get on excellently together. Besides, senile ailments are one of the specialities of

Les Plaisances. Dr. Binger has an international reputation. Mrs. Cobb wouldn't be happy if they transferred her elsewhere. She is near her granddaughter there, too, and she is very fond of Madame Vincent. I'm afraid we're going to have trouble when we suggest her moving.'

'No reason why she should do so, if it suits her better there. After all, she is the one who matters. No crime has been committed by the doctors at the clinic. Just a bit of stupid panic in the face of an emergency. Everything will probably turn out all right.'

She seemed happier for that, although still troubled by the thought that she might have let Bellin down. The last thing she said before the plane touched down at Geneva was that she hoped Littlejohn would not think badly of Bellin, who'd probably made a mistake.

Lindemann was there to meet them. He was anxious to hear what Littlejohn had been doing since last they met and they called at the police station in Geneva. Miss Halston asked to be allowed to go to her hotel right away and settle in before dinner. It was already dusk and there wasn't much more that any of them could do that day. They agreed. It gave Littlejohn and Lindemann a chance for a private talk. Littlejohn arranged to call for Miss Halston at her hotel at ten next morning.

Littlejohn told Lindemann of developments and of the matters he had set in motion concerning the English party: Sir Ensor, Miss Halston and Bellin. He didn't mention the attempt of Bellin to give himself an alibi. He felt he'd rather confront Bellin with the lie himself first.

Lindemann was a bit excited by the news that Littlejohn's hired car had travelled a considerable distance since he'd left it in the car park on the night of the police dinner.

'I have been considering what journeys could have been made covering that distance. It was obviously a trip to *Les Plaisances* from Geneva and back. Could it mean that Cling went there, took the diamonds, and got himself murdered and the jewellery stolen?'

'That is a problem we'll have to settle.'

And he then flabbergasted Lindemann by telling him the tale of Cling's visit to the Helder Bank and substituting the real for the false diamonds.

'That was a strange thing to do. What could he have been up to?'

'I don't know yet. But it has considerably altered my opinion of Cling. It would appear that instead of being the villain of the piece and planning to steal Mrs. Cobb's jewels and run away with them, he was a dutiful officer to

the last. He was murdered in the execution of his duty. He had evidently come across some plot to steal the diamonds, set a trap, saved the diamonds, but lost his own life.'

Intruder in the Night

THE POLICE CAR which took Littlejohn and Kate Halston to *Les Plaisances* followed the now familiar route, but neither of the passengers saw much of the scenery. They were too occupied with their own thoughts for most of the way. Now and then they spoke.

‘Are you familiar with Mrs. Cobb’s routine at the clinic, Miss Halston?’

‘Yes, roughly.’

She spoke without showing much interest. It was evident that the police business in hand was worrying her.

‘What is it?’

‘She takes things very easily and sleeps quite a lot. She wakes at around nine and has her breakfast in bed, if she feels like any. Then she sits up in bed looking at illustrated magazines, reading letters. If she hasn’t any through the post, she reads the old ones. She never throws a letter away. Sometimes, if she feels more energetic than usual or the mood takes her, she does some knitting. Confused work which usually takes the form of presents which nobody can use. But it pleases her to give them and it keeps her interested and occupied. Recently she gave me a jumper in purple and white wool, miles too large for me and with odd sleeves. Had I worn it, it might have created a fashion. And on occasions, when she’s suddenly seized with a period of exceptional energy and lucidity, she’ll read a book or, at least, begin one. She rarely finishes them. Biographies in which people she once knew appear ...’

‘And then?’

‘Lunch. She usually gets up and has lunch in her room, dressed in her *négligé*. Afterwards, another sleep for a couple of hours, under sedative, if necessary. Then tea.’

‘Still in bed?’

‘Yes. She rises about five and dresses. This is quite a ceremony, for she puts on her evening gown and her diamonds. Sometimes, she dines with friends she’s made in the clinic. Or if she’s not in the mood, she takes dinner in her room. Bed about nine after her usual sleeping draught.’

‘I suppose all of you, Sir Ensor, yourself, Bellin and even Cling knew of the daily routine.’

‘Yes. Visiting is more or less controlled by it, so we all knew, approximately, when it would be most convenient to see her.’

‘I’m afraid Mrs. Cobb may be in very poor shape when we call today. She has taken the theft of her diamonds very badly.’

‘I can quite believe it, poor dear. They were the centre of her existence and unless they are returned to her, it will probably kill her.’

‘I hope to be able to tell her she’ll soon have them back. Kindly leave that to me. It may make it easier for me to question her.’

‘I spoke to the clinic from my hotel after I left you at police headquarters. They said we could only see her for a little while. She was rather poorly. I take it she hasn’t been told that Mr. Cling took the jewels.’

‘No. She only knows they’ve gone.’

‘I’m glad. She seemed to think the world of Cling. I can’t think why. She was always more thrilled by a visit from him than from Sir Ensor or Madame Vincent. He might have been her own kith and kin. I never told Sir Ensor that his mother and Cling got on so well. He wasn’t fond of Cling and might have told him to keep away from *Les Plaisances*. In which case, Mrs. Cobb would have been most hurt and disappointed.’

Littlejohn remembered the old aunt and uncle whom Cling used to visit in Leicestershire. They’d thought the world of him and he had treated them with exemplary kindness. Cling must have had a way with old, forgotten people.

‘What does Sir Ensor do about transport when he makes his foreign excursions?’

‘Different things. Sometimes, we hire a vehicle when we arrive. At others, Sir Ensor’s car is flown to our destination if we are travelling by air. In Geneva, however, matters are always more informal with Sir Ensor’s daughter living nearby. Sir Ensor uses Dr. Vincent’s *Mercedes*.’

‘And the doctor’s chauffeur?’

‘No. The doctor needs him as often as not. And we don’t bother to hire a casual man. Roland Bellin or myself drive him around.’

‘On the night of the police banquet … What then?’

‘The three of us travelled from Ferney to Geneva in the *Mercedes* as usual. Roland drove.’

‘And it was parked in the official park at the side of the hotel?’

‘Yes.’

‘It was there when you returned later to Ferney?’

‘Yes. I drove them back. Sir Ensor and Roland had drunk quite a lot of wine. We thought it best that way.’

It was getting on for noon when *Les Plaisances* came in sight. The sun was shining and the place looked very sylvan and happy. Knots of patients were gathered about the fields, as before, and the terrace in front of the main building was set out with tables, chairs and coloured umbrellas for those who were going to lunch out of doors or who merely cared to lounge and take the fresh air.

The police car pulled up at the main entrance and a porter in a brass-buttoned lounge suit and peaked cap opened the door of the vehicle for them. He asked what he could do for them.

Littlejohn took him aside.

‘Excuse me, Miss Halston. I just want a word with the porter.’

She nodded assent and having been greeted by Cardinal Richelieu, who always seemed there to welcome guests, entered into conversation with him, presumably, judging from its seriousness, about notifying His Majesty that the Cardinal was ready for official duties again.

‘Were you on duty last Thursday evening?’

The man with the brass buttons lifted his cap gently and stroked his thin hair.

‘Yes. I usually come on here at ten a.m. and leave at ten p.m., after locking the main door.’

‘You keep an eye on the cars parked here?’

‘Yes. Nobody’s likely to misbehave with them, but it’s just as well to keep a watch on them. For instance, the man who’s known as the Cardinal is quite a good driver. It wouldn’t do for him to take off one day and drive himself to Paris to see His Majesty, would it?’

‘Are any cars left here overnight?’

‘Not as a rule. The staff cars are garaged behind the building under cover. The dews here are sometimes very heavy. It’s best to give the cars a roof over their heads.’

‘When you locked up for the night last Thursday, did you notice any cars in front of here in the open parking place?’

‘Thursday. Let me see. Yes; that would be the night when there were three cars left in the courtyard for some time after dark. I remember it because it was most unusual. By that time, all the visitors have gone and the

staff, even if they have had their cars parked in front, have usually driven them round to the back and put them under cover.'

'What kind of cars were they?'

'There was a little red *Sublime* there. My son-in-law has one, so I recognised the make.'

'What time would that be?'

'It wasn't here at six, when I took a look round, but just before I went in to dinner, about half past eight, I saw it standing there. After dinner, I came out again. It was dark, but I could see well enough. Around nine o'clock that would be. The *Sublime* had gone.'

'Any other cars there?'

'As I said, there were three when I looked. One was Dr. Fauconnet's little coupé. That had gone when I found the *Sublime* wasn't there. She'd probably put it away under cover. The third car was a *Mercedes*. I'd seen it before. It belongs to Dr. Vincent, a consultant from Ferney, who sometimes calls here. His wife comes in it, too, to see her mother who's a patient in the clinic. That was the last to leave.'

'What time?'

'It was there, as I said, when I came out at half past eight. Perhaps the doctor was in with Dr. Fauconnet. However, it had gone when I came out again to lock up at ten.'

'Did you see the drivers of the *Sublime* or the *Mercedes*?'

'Sorry. No.'

'Thank you very much.'

'Anything more I can do, sir?'

'May we see Dr. Binger, now?'

'Of course. What name shall I say?'

Littlejohn gave the man his card. They were ushered in Binger's strange office without delay.

Binger was obviously disturbed by this second visit. He blinked nervously as he greeted them and grew rather effusive in welcoming Kate Halston, as though he saw in her some kind of protection against the rigour of Littlejohn.

'Mrs. Cobb? Of course you may see her. But I warn you, she is not herself. Not herself, by any means. The loss of her jewellery has upset her very much. You won't be able to stay with her long. In fact, you won't wish to stay long. Her condition is most disappointing ...'

He led the way out, walking with his left shoulder ahead of his right one, like someone swimming a sidestroke. They took the lift to a second storey on the front of the building and in the corridor Binger handed them over to a nurse whom Littlejohn hadn't seen before.

'I won't come in with you. I saw Mrs. Cobb not more than a couple of hours ago. Nurse Armleder will look after you. I may see you again on your way out.'

He looked as if he hoped not, shook hands limply and left them.

Mrs. Cobb was sitting up in bed cutting illustrations from a fashion journal with a pair of scissors. It was obvious that she was glad to see Miss Halston and she shook hands with her and kissed her and brightened up considerably until she remembered she was in trouble and began to weep rather childishly.

'I'm so glad to see you, Kate. I'm in terrible trouble. My diamonds have gone and nice Nurse Durand is ill and someone else is looking after me and I don't like her.'

Miss Halston comforted her and gave her a bunch of flowers and a box of chocolates. Mrs. Cobb at once opened the latter and began to eat the contents, in spite of the fact that she was in the middle of complaining about her lack of appetite.

'And now I have some good news for you, Mrs. Cobb. This is Superintendent Littlejohn, of London, who has something to tell you.'

Littlejohn had been standing in the background awaiting his turn. He was rather surprised at Mrs. Cobb, as she wasn't what he had expected. In fact, in his opinion, there were many elderly ladies far less lucid and more helpless than she, wandering about Geneva on holidays. She was, as far as he could see, plump, fair, with a good pink complexion, white hair which frequently had the services of a good hairdresser, and with china blue eyes. He'd been given to understand that she was around eighty. She looked at least ten years younger than that.

He approached the bed and shook the proffered hand. She wore several rings with stones the value of which he couldn't estimate. They might have been glass for anything he knew, but probably weren't.

'It is nice of you to call. You are a policeman?'

'That's right, Mrs. Cobb.'

'Like Mr. Cling was. A nice man, Mr. Cling. He never came abroad without calling here to see me and bringing me a book or some flowers or

chocolates. We used to talk together for hours when he could spare the time. He was as you know, a great friend of my son's. They were travelling companions.'

Littlejohn wondered what Sir Ensor would have to say to that if he were present!

'Kate says you have some news for me.'

'Yes. I'm glad to say that I think your diamonds will soon be recovered for you and brought back ...'

Mrs. Cobb was overjoyed. She clapped her hands, laughed aloud, and then burst into tears. The nurse standing in the background looked ready to terminate the interview, but as Mrs. Cobb cooled off and started to be normal again, she decided to let the talk go on for a little longer.

'The real diamonds, Mr....'

'Littlejohn, madam.'

'Mr. Littlejohn. The *real* ones. I won't have the glass ones back. I told Ensor, the glass ones mean nothing to me. I shall throw them through the window. I want the ones my husband gave me with his love so many years ago. I can tell if I'm given any other ...'

'These are the real ones.'

'Did Alec recover them? I'm sure he did. He was that kind of man. Always ready to do anything for me, anything I needed. Mr. Bellin often called, too, and was particularly solicitous about me and the safety of my diamonds. But he wasn't the same as Alec. Not so kind and understanding. It was Alec?'

'Yes.'

Which wasn't a lie.

'How is Alec? Where is he?'

That was more difficult. Littlejohn bypassed it.

'When did you last see him?'

'Last Thursday afternoon. I know that because it was the day I had the appointment with Miss Pally. Miss Pally is the hairdresser. When Alec called, I was in my bathroom and Miss Pally was washing my hair. Most inconvenient and amusing. I told Nurse Durand, who was here, too, to give him a copy of *Vogue* and sit him in my bedroom until I was ready. He had to wait almost half an hour and then I came in and saw him with my hair wrapped up in a turban like a rajah. He didn't stay long. He'd brought me some flowers as he said he was passing through Rolle and couldn't do so

without calling. He was always very nice to me. He stayed about a quarter of an hour ...'

Long enough to take the diamonds from their drawer and pocket them.

'That was in the afternoon?'

'Yes; about half past two. I went back to bed after he left and Miss Pally had finished with me. I was a little exhausted and had some letters to write.'

'Did you see Mr. Cling again after that?'

'No. But the nurse told me that he had called after tea, whilst I was having my nap. He said he left his spectacles by my bedside and asked if he could recover them. He didn't awake me. Just took them and left. I was a bit mystified when I heard. I hadn't seen the spectacles at my bedside. Perhaps they'd fallen on the floor as I rummaged among the bottles and papers there.'

'And that was the last time you saw him?'

'The last time he called. As I said I was asleep and didn't see him. You might tell him to call again as soon as he is able. And now, I'm tired. I'll have a little sleep. I shall sleep well and please see that my jewellery is brought to me as quickly as possible ...'

The nurse took this as a signal and intervened. They bade Mrs. Cobb good-bye. She seemed to have lost all interest in them now as she contemplated the return of her diamonds and it didn't seem much use prolonging the interview. They found themselves out in the corridor again, down the lift, and in the main hall before they quite knew what was happening. The technique of removing visitors at *Les Plaisances* seemed a fine art.

'Shall we call on Nurse Durand whilst we're here?'

'I'm sorry, but I think she's been transferred to a clinic in Geneva. No doubt, we could arrange for you to see her there before you return.'

It was approaching lunch time at the clinic, which was obvious from the state of the great hall, which seemed to be overflowing with occupants, waiting for the gong to sound and break the boredom by a good meal.

Tape Recordings and Other Things

THE WAY BACK to Geneva from *Les Plaisances* seemed more light-hearted than the way there. This was largely due to the changed mood of Kate Halston, who appeared to be relieved that some topic or question had not been raised. She grew more talkative and finally Littlejohn began to question her discreetly.

‘Does Bellin do your work for Sir Ensor when you’re away from the office?’

‘No. They usually bring in someone from another department to deal with the routine stuff.’

‘What exactly is Bellin’s job?’

‘You might call him Sir Ensor’s man-of-affairs. I am personal secretary, if you understand. Mr. Bellin looks after business matters and also handles confidential details out of the orbit of the government duties, which, of course, are mainly dealt with by the parliamentary and civil service officials. I might say that Mr. Bellin often writes Sir Ensor’s speeches for him. Sir Ensor tries out the jokes in his speeches on Mr. Bellin, too. He loves, when he is that way inclined, to scrap the speech Mr. Bellin has written and deliver one of his own, off the cuff, so to speak. And woe betide Mr. Bellin *and* me, if we don’t notice what he’s done and compliment him on it and say it was much better than the one written by Mr. Bellin.’

‘How long has Bellin been with Sir Ensor?’

‘About ten years. The previous secretary was killed in a plane accident. One of Sir Ensor’s school friends recommended Mr. Bellin and Sir Ensor took him on.’

‘You and Bellin get on very well together?’

‘Yes.’

Somehow a feeling of constriction entered into the conversation as Bellin was discussed. Something emotional. Either jealousy or affection – or more than that.

‘Did Cling have much to do with Bellin?’

‘Not very much, but when Cling was seconded to attending on Sir Ensor they naturally saw more of each other.’

‘Did they get on well?’

‘There was no friction between them, if that’s what you mean.’

‘I mean more than that. I gather that Cling rather despised Bellin. Was that true?’

She had grown flushed and angry looking.

‘I don’t know why you are asking me all these questions. One would think ...’

‘Yes?’

‘That you suspected Mr. Bellin of something.’

‘I have to cover all the ground concerning Cling’s death. If Cling disliked, almost hated Bellin, I want to find out why. What was between them?’

‘Cling was jealous of Mr. Bellin. Naturally, Sir Ensor was too busy to give Cling his orders personally, so it often fell to Mr. Bellin to do it. Cling resented that and didn’t fail to show his resentment.’

‘And that was all?’

‘Really. Do you expect me to say that Mr. Bellin hated Cling enough to kill him?’

‘I expect you to tell me the truth.’

‘There is no truth in your suspicions. Mr. Bellin probably didn’t care anything at all about Cling’s opinion of him. He usually treated his offhand manner with indifference.’

‘I find that Bellin seems to treat most matters with indifference. Is his casual way genuine or just hiding his real feelings?’

‘I can’t say. I find him very different from what you do. He is always polite and efficient, and I don’t know what Sir Ensor would do without him.’

By the time they reached Geneva, relations were strained between them. Kate Halston obviously resented Littlejohn’s questions and views about Bellin.

They called at the police station again. Lindemann was out but his deputy was there with a message that he wouldn’t be long away. Meanwhile, Inspector Verdino, the deputy, would give any necessary help.

‘I have Miss Halston, Sir Ensor’s private secretary, waiting for me in the police car outside, Inspector. When she arrives at her hotel, I expect she will telephone London. I wish that call and any others, in or out, to be taped and reported back to me.’

‘Certainly ...’

Verdino gave the necessary instructions immediately by internal telephone.

‘I, too, have something to report, Superintendent Littlejohn. A message from London from Inspector Cromwell.’

‘I’ll just see Miss Halston on her way and then I’ll return to you right away for your news.’

Littlejohn went below to where Miss Halston was waiting in the car.

‘Well, there’s nothing much for me to do. Inspector Lindemann is out on business, which leaves me some time to spare. Would you care to have lunch with me?’

‘No, thank you, Superintendent. I hope you’ll forgive me. I have a headache. The rush and travelling, you know. I’ll have a light meal and then a rest.’

He’d expected that. Her mood after his close questioning was one of wishing to be politely rid of him as soon as possible.

‘I’ll send the car for you around three in time for the plane back. Meanwhile, what have you decided about Mrs. Cobb? Is she to be moved to another clinic or return home with you, as Sir Ensor wished?’

‘In view of how we found matters at *Les Plaisances* this morning, I think I shall recommend to Sir Ensor that she stay on for, at least, another week or so. She seems happy and settled again and, in view of your message about the diamonds, her mind is at rest. If Sir Ensor insists, I can make another trip next week. You are returning by the same plane?’

‘Yes. There’s not much more to keep me here.’

She didn’t seem excited about the news. His poor opinion of Bellin had put them in opposite camps and now she seemed to find no pleasure in his company.

‘Till this afternoon, then.’

‘Yes. I’ll see you at the airport, Superintendent.’

Cromwell’s message had been tape-recorded and Littlejohn found Verdino in his office with a machine on the desk, ready to play the tape back to him. As Cromwell’s voice came from the contraption, Littlejohn felt a faint pang of nostalgia. He’d had quite enough of investigating crime on his own in foreign parts.

‘Good morning, sir. I hope all is going well ...’

A very formal start, but Cromwell soon lapsed into his casual, humorous style again.

‘I thought I’d better look after Bellin myself. He doesn’t know me and I thought I’d like to try the old game again, shadowing suspects. You, I suppose, are keeping an eye on Miss Halston. When I heard that you and she were on the same plane to Geneva, I thought you’d see to everything at that end. I hope that was right by you.’

A pause.

‘Bellin led me a bit of a dance. He spent the day in what I assumed was routine work at Sir Ensor’s office. At five, he emerged and went right away for cocktails at the *Blue Feather* in the Haymarket. At six, Bellin drove home to his flat in Devonshire Place. I began then to wish I’d put someone junior on the job. He kept me waiting for two hours. Luckily, there’s a restaurant opposite. I got a window seat and ate a full meal, which I hope the cashier will approve when I put in the expenses slip. Then Bellin came out again. He crossed to a garage and emerged in his car. Quite an expensive sports affair, the speed of which didn’t do him much good in the traffic. I followed him in a taxi, wondering what I’d do at the other end, because Bellin was in his dinner clothes. He stopped and parked off Piccadilly and walked the rest, down St. James’s to *Delaney’s Club*.

‘I know Cutforth, who manages the club, very well. He owes me a good turn, so I entered by the private way to his office, found him in, and asked about Bellin. Cutforth didn’t seem surprised. He told me quite a lot about Bellin, who plays there three nights a week and, of late, has lost very heavily. Mr. Bellin seems to have recently been cutting a dash he can’t afford. He owes the club a little short of five thousand pounds. Cutforth didn’t seem greatly upset. Bellin, it seems has connections. Or so he says. I know differently. Records in Special Branch show him as a man of little family background who made his way through school and college brilliantly through hard work. Then, after the war, he became somewhat of a layabout. He’d been a colonel in the army and after his discharge couldn’t settle to a real job. He is fond of women and his wife divorced him six years ago. His father, believe it or not, was once rector of Greyle and a canon in the church. Sir Ensor’s family were patrons of the living and Sir Ensor took Bellin on for his old man’s sake. The old man’s dead.’

‘Cutforth told me that Bellin had said that he was shortly to receive a legacy from a family trust which would pay his debts. I found out the name of Bellin’s bank from Cutforth, who’s cashed a few cheques, small ones, for Bellin. I spoke to the bank before I made this call. As usual, the manager

was very cagey. Couldn't divulge anything. But he did say that as far as he knew, Bellin had no expectations whatever. The way the manager said it, I gathered that he'd fully investigated that and every other financial avenue concerning our friend. The manager's prim manner made me guess that there was an uneasy overdraft somewhere in the main office.

'I stayed at the club till eleven and then thought there was no more I could do. Bellin, it seems, had had a bit of better luck before I left. I must have been his unseen mascot. He'd won two hundred. That won't go far, I'm sure. But there's one final surprise. Cling was at the club about a month ago, making similar enquiries about Bellin. Cutforth, who knew Cling well, told him the same that he'd told me. Only then, Bellin merely owed the club three thousand.'

'That's all for the present and I hope it's helpful ... Looking forward to seeing you back very soon ...'

The tape trailed blankly away.

'Could I speak to Scotland Yard, Inspector Verdino, please? The ordinary telephone. Please have them ask for Inspector Cromwell.'

Littlejohn could imagine his old friend sitting at his ink-stained desk in the room he himself had once occupied in the days when he and Cromwell had worked together on so many cases. The telephone rang.

'Hullo, Cromwell. Yes. I'm coming home by the afternoon plane. See you then. Meanwhile, please have a fullblown tail put on Bellin. If he tries to run for cover, he'd better be detained. No. You can't charge him with anything. I shall be back at the Yard about six. If he does try anything, just say I wish to speak with him, and you, or whoever does the job, has instructions to invite him to see me. Invite? Yes. Bring him in. But I've an idea he might try to brazen out this business. However, we'll see. Use your own discretion, then, and you have me fully behind you. Right. See you later ... By the way, I shall be accompanied on the plane by a lady, Miss Halston. Get a tail on her where I leave off, as well, will you ...?'

Verdino, who had just received another tape from a messenger was gesturing that he had something else for Littlejohn.

'The lady did make a telephone call to London. It was in English and was recorded at the hotel switchboard. Shall I play it over.'

'Please do.'

It was very brief and cruel.

'Is that you, Roland? Kate here ...'

‘Well?’

‘I’m just phoning to say that I shall be back today.’

‘With Mrs. Cobb?’

‘No. You don’t sound very pleased.’

‘Why are you ringing me?’

A pause, as though emotion had cut short her speech.

‘If that’s the way you feel about it, I’ll tell you and leave you. I have been to *Les Plaisances* with Littlejohn this morning. He asked me a lot of questions about you. He is returning with me tonight and it looks as if he’ll be asking you some further questions. That is all. I thought I’d warn you ...’

‘Very foolish of you to ring me ... You might be overheard. In any case, what have I to be afraid of? What are you worried about?’

‘Roland! What’s the matter with you? I thought that you and I ...’

‘You shouldn’t think!’

And the phone was hung up.

Lindemann arrived and he and Littlejohn retired to his office. They discussed together again the pattern of the case and the steps to be taken to bring it to a head.

Lindemann’s routine work was exemplary. All alibis had been checked, even those of the relatives of Sir Ensor at *Mont-Choisi*.

‘One more thing, Lindemann. Have you a list of stolen cars for the night of Cling’s death. I hope that gives us an answer; otherwise there’ll be a lot more work among taxi-drivers and hire-and-drive merchants. Dr. Vincent’s *Mercedes* was removed from *Les Plaisances* before ten o’clock that night. Whoever took it away, didn’t walk there. It must have been by car.’

‘Dr. Vincent wasn’t inside the clinic when the attendant saw his car. So he didn’t drive it there himself. He went to Gex in his small car for a consultation ...’

Lindemann rang the bell and the records were produced.

Seven cars had been stolen between five o’clock and midnight on the night of Cling’s death. Three hadn’t been recovered as yet; one had turned out to be a false alarm; and the other three had been abandoned in various parts of the district. One as far away as Brig, on the Italian border; one in Berne; and the third in a spinney adjacent to *Les Plaisances*.

‘That’s the one! Funny nobody connected it with the trouble at the clinic.’

‘It was only found this morning. Some picnickers came across it, very well hidden. It was at once examined. As in the case of your car, there were no useful fingerprints. The examination is being continued.’

‘You might ask them to see if there’s any gravel like that in the drive at *Les Plaisances* lying about in the car. That would more or less clinch it.’

‘We’ll attend to that.’

‘By the way, who was the owner of the stolen car?’

‘It is a small two-seater and belongs to one of the pathologists at the medico-legal institute.’

‘He was at the police dinner?’

‘Yes; and left his car, unlocked, along with the rest in the official park in front of the *Hôtel du Roi*. He had to beg a lift from a colleague.’

That was as far as it went.

Littlejohn telephoned Scotland Yard again and confirmed that he would be with Cromwell at six o’clock, if the plane ran to schedule. He also asked that a message be sent to Sir Ensor Cobb, arranging a meeting that evening at Sir Ensor’s convenience.

Then, he and Lindemann went out for the long promised lunch together.

Home and Finish

LITTLEJOHN'S journey back to London was an uncomfortable one. Neither he nor Kate Halston was anxious for the other's company, but courtesy seemed to compel them to sit together. Littlejohn had, in the past, accompanied many prisoners from place to place and their company had for the most part been more jocular than that of his present companion. Conversation was difficult and mainly concerned Switzerland and holidays they had spent in the past. Luckily, the journey lasted only a little more than an hour and the plane touched down promptly at five o'clock.

Bellin was there to meet Miss Halston. He was either determined to brazen out his present difficulties or else he wished to talk to her urgently. His manner was as smooth and aloof to her as to Littlejohn and the Superintendent was relieved when he lost them in the customs shed. He was convinced that they had as eagerly lost him.

Cromwell was waiting for him at the entrance to the main hall. He was still smiling after his recent encounter with Bellin.

‘He’s a cool one. Our man Lester has been on his heels all day and, in spite of Miss Halston’s furtive warning earlier, nothing whatever has happened. Lester got a bit excited when he heard Bellin was making for London airport, but it seems he’s only here to meet Miss Halston. They’ve just got in a car in the park and are presumably going back to London to Sir Ensor.’

Suddenly the loudspeaker broke into the conversation.

‘Will Inspector Cromwell please report at the enquiry desk in the main hall?’

It carried Littlejohn’s mind back to the Cling case which had begun in a similar way.

Cromwell shrugged wearily.

‘Can’t even have a bit of peace when I take an hour off to meet homecoming friends ...’

The girl at the enquiry desk was conspiratorial.

‘You’re wanted in the airport police office.’

And there they found Bellin, white and spluttering with rage. The situation had even upset his customary aplomb and he was squaring-up to a

very red and embarrassed young detective, who almost sobbed with relief when his two superiors entered the room.

He rushed to them to get in the first word.

‘I thought I’d better ask him to come here with me. You said I’d to use my discretion and detain him if the situation called for it. I hope I did right.’

‘Right! We’ll see whether or not you did right, my fine young chap, when this is reported. I was supposed to be leaving on a special mission for the Minister on the 17.45 plane. I hope it’s being held for me.’

Littlejohn shook his head.

‘It isn’t, sir. I’m afraid our business with you is more important just now than whatever you’re catching a plane about ...’

Detective-Constable Lester couldn’t contain himself.

‘He left the lady he was meeting in the car and went off pretending to see to the baggage. Instead, he made for the Dublin plane on which he must have checked in his own luggage ...’

As if to confirm this, the loudspeakers gave tongue again somewhat irritably.

‘Will Mr. McHarrie, passenger for Dublin, kindly join the plane at once? This is the final call.’

‘You travelling as Mr. McHarrie?’ asked Cromwell with a chuckle, but Bellin didn’t see the joke.

‘When Sir Ensor hears of this, it will be curtains for you three, to say the least of it.’

The airport police staff stood flabbergasted at the rumpus. Bellin began to shout abuse and Littlejohn was now asking for Sir Ensor over the phone.

‘Will you be quiet, Bellin! I can’t hear myself speak.’

Sir Ensor arrived on the line at last, after a lot of noise over the instrument and a long wait. ‘Yes?’

‘This is Littlejohn, Sir Ensor. I have just arrived in London airport from Geneva ...’

‘Couldn’t it have waited until you reached town?’

‘It could not. If it hadn’t been urgent, I’d not have disturbed you, sir. I was just in time to meet your Mr. Bellin on his way to Dublin on a special mission for you ...’

‘Dublin! You must be mistaken. He left here an hour ago, to meet Miss Halston and bring her back to the office. Are you sure you’ve met the right man?’

‘Of course I’m sure. And I’m bringing him along to your office without delay. My colleague, Inspector Cromwell, will already have told you that I wish to see you on urgent business.’

‘That is so. But later in the day will suit me better.’

‘I’m sorry, sir, but I prefer to come right away. Mr. Bellin is angry and impatient and will accompany me.’

‘Very well. But I don’t understand all this about Bellin and Dublin. Why Dublin?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know sir. We’ll ask him when we see you.’

Bellin had cooled off and now tried to shrug off the whole escapade.

‘Now look here, Littlejohn. You’re a man of the world. I was merely making a trip to see a lady friend. I’d have been back tomorrow. You understand?’

‘You’re travelling incog., sir? Mr. McHarrie, was it?’

Bellin flushed, but controlled himself.

‘Discretion is the better part of valour, isn’t it, in such circumstances?’

He almost winked, but seemed to think better of it.

‘I ask you as a special favour, Littlejohn, not to push the Dublin matter too hard when we see Sir Ensor. He is a bit prim and proper and, well ... it might ...’

Littlejohn turned to Lester without replying.

‘Lester, you’ve done very well and I will see that you get commendation for it. Meanwhile, you can call it a day. Go now to the car park and see if Miss Halston’s still waiting where you saw Mr. Bellin desert her. Take her to Sir Ensor Cobb’s office in the same car.’

He raised his voice a little.

‘We will follow with Mr. Bellin in the police car.’

‘I protest! I came here to pick up and escort Miss Halston ...’

‘And tried to abscond to Dublin without her. No, sir. This time we’ll escort you to Sir Ensor. We want you to join in a conference there about what happened to Cling. It would be useless without you.’

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about, but it’s no joking matter. You’ll see what happens when I report your behaviour to Sir Ensor.’

‘Including the desertion of Miss Halston and the rendezvous in Dublin?’

‘You’ll see.’

He sat smoking cigarettes in silence all the way back to Westminster and there they found Sir Ensor in a very unpleasant temper. He was

annoyed with Littlejohn for upsetting his schedule and changing the appointment and for appearing with a ruffled Bellin after the escapade at the airport. As a rule, Sir Ensor was surrounded by secretaries who kept trouble at bay. Now there were none there.

‘What were you up to, Roland?’

‘I told Superintendent Littlejohn that I had a meeting in Dublin with an old friend ...’

‘Of feminine gender, Sir Ensor.’

‘... and had arranged to stay the night and return tomorrow.’

Sir Ensor angrily whipped off his half-moon glasses.

‘You might have told me. I might have needed you urgently. However, now that you are here, what are you doing under police escort? Littlejohn, you’d better explain this to me.’

‘It will take some time, Sir Ensor. May we all sit down?’

Sir Ensor indicated with a sweep of his hand that there were chairs available here and there and Littlejohn, Cromwell and Bellin collected one apiece and seated themselves in a semi-circle around Cobb’s desk.

‘By the way, where’s Kate? You said she travelled back from Geneva with you?’

‘Yes. One of our men is driving her here from the airport.’

Sir Ensor started fussing with buttons and switches and finally discovered that Miss Halston was taking tea in her own office.

‘Tell her to stand by in case I need her ... Now, Littlejohn.’

‘May I first ask, Sir Ensor, whether or not Cling proposed to take his annual leave on his return with you from Geneva?’

Cobb flushed a blotchy red and had difficulty in meeting Littlejohn’s straight look.

‘Yes. What of it? It had nothing to do with his death.’

‘On the contrary, sir. It puts a completely different complexion on the case. You should have told us, sir.’

Sir Ensor hemmed and hawed and then sheepishly continued.

‘He’d arranged his leave with his superior officers at Special Branch. He was going to visit friends in America. He was set to take his holiday the day after we got back in London. Instead, as our business ended with the dinner on Thursday and we proposed leaving Geneva on Friday morning, I told Cling he could finish on Thursday and leave for America from Geneva if he wished. He hesitated, but I insisted. I told nobody. It was between

Cling and me and I was glad to be relieved of him as soon as possible. But had the Prime Minister known I was abroad without escort, even for a day after his strict insistence on my being protected, he might have been rather annoyed. That's all there was to it.'

So, Sir Ensor, too had a boss whom he feared!

'Cling had, we found, booked a ticket from Zürich to Chicago, where he hoped to meet his wife. The man she had run away with years ago was dead. Cling had never divorced her or married again in the constant belief that she would, one day, return to him. He simply could not bring himself to believe that she could prefer someone else. He had obviously, before he died, made up his mind to try again. He seems to have carried on a more or less enthusiastic love affair with one of the staff at *Les Plaisances* and treated her rather badly. Nurse Durand, whom he met several times when he visited your mother, Sir Ensor.'

'My mother? I didn't even know he knew her.'

'Of course he did. He had accompanied you as escort several times when you visited her. Cling was fond of children and old people. Extremely kind and attentive to them, however offhand and awkward he might have been to those in between. He and your mother became very good friends. That was really the cause of his death.'

'I don't know what you're talking about. She never once mentioned Cling to me.'

'Perhaps she did and you were too preoccupied to notice what she said. An old lady, living in the past ...'

'Please don't be impertinent, Littlejohn. I resent the insinuation.'

'I'm sorry, sir. But that seems to be the fate of many old people these days. We could do with a few more Clings to make them feel interesting and wanted. Your mother confided many things to Cling during his visits. He rarely visited Geneva without calling on her to pay his respects.'

'I like his damned cheek.'

'I don't regard it as cheek. Your mother certainly appreciated it. He formed the habit of looking after her in a mild way, as he did his own aged relations. He might have treated Nurse Durand badly by deceiving her with hopes of marriage when his heart was set on nobody else but his faithless and faded wife, but he certainly did well for Mrs. Cobb.'

'What is this! A funeral oration on Cling! Please get on with your business, Littlejohn, and let me get on with mine.'

‘The business of finding Cling’s murderer, sir.’

‘Have you got him?’

‘Not yet, sir.’

‘Well, isn’t it time? How far have you got with the case?’

‘I was just beginning to tell you ... Cling knew as well as you and your secretaries about the very valuable jewellery your mother had in her possession at *Les Plaisances*.’

‘It’s no wonder you aren’t progressing with the case, Littlejohn. You seem to have spent most of your time interfering in matters which don’t concern you, personal matters concerning my mother.’

‘The murder arose through the diamonds which your mother had in her room, sir. They cost, I believe, £20,000 thirty years ago. That makes them worth at least £50,000 now. Quite a fair haul for anyone in need of the money. Cling was murdered in protecting them.’

The idea of a crime which he had regarded as a subtle, perhaps international affair, being reduced to a simple burglary was more than Cobb could contemplate. His jaw dropped and his eyes stuck out of their sockets.

‘Are you sure that’s the motive?’

‘Dead sure, sir. That is why the bulk of our investigations have centred round *Les Plaisances*.’

‘Cling knew about the jewellery, then. It’s more likely, isn’t it, that he himself was trying to rob my mother of them? All this so-called friendship with her and his affair with her nurse. It seems plain ...’

‘You know yourself, sir, that once Cling got his hands on the real diamonds, he took good care to put them in a safe place. He took them to your bank, obtained access to your strong-box, under bank supervision, of course, and by what we might call a sleight of hand, changed them for the artificial ones. He suspected there was some game afoot and was determined to put the gems out of harm’s way. You were informed of that by your bank in Geneva, sir.’

‘That’s true. Whom did Cling suspect?’

‘Right from the beginning of their relationship brought about through you, sir, Cling disliked Roland Bellin ...’

Bellin who had been lolling in his chair and trying to look bored, suddenly sprang to life and leapt to his feet.

‘I protest! I’m not being brought into this. I admit I never liked Cling and always kept an eye on him, but that doesn’t mean to say I wanted to kill

him. Why should I? He was nothing to me, provided he did his job properly and Sir Ensor wasn't incommoded by him. As far as I was concerned, I couldn't care less about Cling. A mere policeman. In any event, I'm not having Littlejohn, who seems unable to solve this matter, pinning the blame on me.'

Sir Ensor raised his hand majestically.

'All right, Roland. Don't get excited. We'll hear what Littlejohn has to say with as much patience as we can muster, and then you shall have your turn. Now, Littlejohn?'

'I was saying, Cling disliked Bellin and the more he learned about him, the more he seemed to hate him. What he learned from your mother and Nurse Durand didn't make him change his mind. Mr. Bellin was very interested in Mrs. Cobb's jewellery and both Mrs. Cobb and the nurse said he knew all about where it was kept and when it was worn. He was a frequent visitor at *Les Plaisances*, Sir Ensor, not always in your company, either.'

'That's just nonsense. Of course I was interested in Mrs. Cobb and her comfort at *Les Plaisances*. And of course I knew about the diamonds. It was part of my duty as Sir Ensor's man-of-affairs to be so. As for Cling, he must have had quite other motives for his visits. He was hand in glove with Nurse Durand and my investigations showed that they were preparing to make a run for it with the diamonds. I don't suppose you know, Littlejohn, but Cling and the nurse had a flat in Geneva where they met in secret.'

'Indeed! Where?'

'Near Eaux-Vives station.'

'How did you find out?'

'I was suspicious about what Cling did in his off hours when he wasn't with Sir Ensor, so I followed him one day. He ended up at the flat.'

'Did you know of this, Sir Ensor?'

'No. It's news to me.'

'So it is to everybody else, except the police and Mr. Bellin. He has embellished the place, too. It was a small bedroom in a seedy little hotel ...'

'You know then? Well, I only found out by accident. I expect you got at it much more easily, with all your wonderful organisation.'

Sir Ensor was getting impatient. He slapped his desk petulantly with the flat of his hand.

‘For goodness’ sake, let’s get on. This is leading nowhere. Littlejohn; have you any more to tell me?’

‘Just this, sir. Cling and Nurse Durand used to meet. Perhaps he was fond of her; I don’t know. He seems to have confided a lot in her. In his depressed moods he reviled Scotland Yard, his job, even you. But all the time, he was getting information from her about your mother and her jewellery. He’d good reason for thinking that Mr. Bellin would, before long, make an attempt on it.’

‘Could you excuse me, Sir Ensor? I refuse to stay here and listen to Littlejohn’s theories. A lot of imaginative rot. He dislikes me as much as he says Cling did. And I dislike Littlejohn. He’s trying to cause trouble for me and I’m not going to have it. I hope you’ll end this interview and see that Littlejohn is officially dealt with for the way he’s treated me today ...’

‘Sit down, Roland. If you wish Littlejohn’s story to be refuted, you must first listen to the whole of it. Now let him continue.’

‘Cling had made enquiries concerning Mr. Bellin. He found out that he was a confirmed gambler at *Delaney’s Club*, where he owed around five thousand pounds.’

‘Is this true, Roland?’

‘It was, at one time, but I’ve paid it off. You’ll see ...’

‘I will, believe me. Is that true, Littlejohn?’

‘I don’t know, Sir Ensor, but Mr. Bellin told Cutforth at the club that he was expecting a legacy from family sources and that the money would then be repaid. Actually, Mr. Bellin proved, on further enquiries, to have neither family nor resources ...’

Sir Ensor assumed a very judicial attitude. He again raised his hand to silence Bellin.

‘Not now, Bellin. Littlejohn can tell us his side. Then you will be given an opportunity to refute it by facts, not by mere denials. Go on ...’

‘In Geneva, Cling waited. Nothing happened. Your mother’s jewellery remained undisturbed. Then came the last day. Cling just couldn’t believe his theory wasn’t true. At 2.30 on Thursday afternoon, whilst your mother should, according to custom, have been in bed enjoying her nap, he arrived on what he said was a farewell call, as you were all returning the following morning to England. Instead of being in bed, Mrs. Cobb was in the hands of her hairdresser in the bathroom, which gave Cling an even better opportunity of examining the diamonds to find if they were the real ones

and then pocketing them and taking them away to put in the bank in safety. This he did. He changed the articles at the bank, and, your mother informed me, reappeared after tea, when your mother was taking her postponed sleep. He placed the artificial diamonds in the drawer and left without waking her.'

'But why?'

'As I said, he was making sure that your mother's jewellery, which meant so much to her, was safe. Maybe, also, he had some intuition that all might not be well with him much longer. At any rate, he was determined to do his best before he left Geneva. Had he told you about his suspicions of Bellin, you wouldn't have believed him.'

Bellin made harsh noises. 'Cling! A do-gooder. Don't make me laugh. He was a crook. I wouldn't be surprised if he proved to be a foreign agent as well.'

'You should know that, Mr. Bellin. You seem to know all about Cling. However, as I said, Cling found time was running out. His idea that Mr. Bellin might make an attempt to rob Mrs. Cobb seemed to be coming to nothing. Now, we arrive at the last night. Cling has seen you safely, Sir Ensor, to the police farewell dinner. Mr. Bellin is with you and leaves you as you take your place at the high table and returns to the body of the hall. Dinner is served at seven. Afterwards, the usual speeches are to be made to the usual strict schedule. You are due to speak at ten-thirty. Half-way through the dinner, Mr. Bellin leaves the hotel and taking your *Mercedes* car drives to *Les Plaisances*. All is quiet there. Mrs. Cobb is already in bed and asleep. Mr. Bellin, now quite familiar with the place, enters, takes the jewellery, and returns to the car ...'

'I never left the hotel. So your theories are wrong there.'

Bellin was quite collected. He seemed sure of himself. Sir Ensor, still emulating a judge, silenced him.

'The attendant who supervises the main door of *Les Plaisances* is prepared to swear that he saw the *Mercedes* car at the door between half past eight and ten o'clock. Side by side with it he also saw the *Sublime*, which I had hired and which Cling had taken. You see, Cling had been waiting for Mr. Bellin, who unexpectedly made his move. Cling told a good tale to the car hire depot opposite the hotel, secured a duplicate key, took my car and followed Mr. Bellin. When Bellin returned to his car, bearing what he thought were the real diamonds, Cling was waiting for him. He

arrested Bellin, took him with him in the *Sublime*, and started back for Geneva, where, I guess, he proposed to denounce him to Sir Ensor. Physically, Cling was more than a match for Bellin. It looked as if Bellin had reached the end of the road. Then, Bellin found the small fire extinguisher under his seat. They must have been very near Geneva at the time, for he couldn't take a chance in the open. He waited until they reached the darkness of the hotel park, then struck such a blow with the extinguisher, that it killed Cling before he knew what had hit him.'

Bellin even yawned. He must have been well practised in the art of pretending to be bored with life.

'It was, I reckon, about half past nine. Sir Ensor would be on his feet and making his speech at about ten-thirty. At all costs, the *Mercedes* must be back to take him home. Bellin had to dispose of the body at once and he hadn't time to do it. And here was his problem. Sir Ensor was in the habit of closely questioning Bellin about speeches he'd made, and how the audience received them. He even repeated his jokes for Bellin's opinion. Bellin had written the speech, I gather, but Sir Ensor had a habit of ditching his notes and giving a speech of his own off the cuff, if he was in the mood. Bellin had to know what he said or else Sir Ensor might discover that he hadn't been there at all. He was depending on this for his alibi ... That and perhaps other things.'

'I shall produce my alibi in a minute when you have finished your rigmarole ...'

'That is all, Sir Ensor. Bellin looked for the darkest, quietest spot, which proved to be the English rose-garden of the hotel and put the *Sublime*, with the body in it, there. It wasn't there very long. The porter, who with his official duties combined perhaps the pleasures of snooping round spying on couples, happened to start on a prowl round the garden not very long before Sir Ensor began to speak ...'

'Is that all, Littlejohn?'

'Except this, sir. The *Mercedes* was still at *Les Plaisances*, as Cling had insisted on Bellin accompanying him in my *Sublime*. Bellin had to get back there and have it in its place in the hotel car park before you left the hall. Otherwise, the cat would have been out of the bag. He took the most available car from the park, drove quickly to *Les Plaisances*, ditched the stolen car, and returned in the *Mercedes*. The porter at *Les Plaisances* states that the *Mercedes* had gone by ten o'clock. Who else could have used the

Mercedes, driven it to *Les Plaisances*, and then taken it away again? It was Mr. Bellin ...'

'Except that I have an alibi ...'

Sir Ensor raised his eyebrows at Bellin, as though he was surprised that he was making an attempt to spoil a very good story.

'I was with Kate Halston most of the evening at the dinner ...'

Littlejohn sighed. What an effort! It was bound to fail from the start.

'You have no alibi. Miss Halston was with a friend all the evening, who has confirmed the fact. You see, Bellin, however far matters had gone between you and Miss Halston, as soon as she guessed your intrigue about Mrs. Cobb's diamonds, you lost your ally and your alibi. She has told me the truth. She never saw you at all from the time you went in to dinner, to the time when you joined her and Sir Ensor after the news of Cling's death. I know you pretended to be drunk and she had to drive you both to Ferney, but the alibi you concocted and tried to get her to pass off on me, didn't work. Also, you are, I think the only one of Sir Ensor's staff who knew of Cling's hideout in Eaux-Vives. It must have been you who almost tore the room apart in your hunt for the diamonds which you thought Cling had switched and hidden there. You soon found out you'd been duped when you had time to examine your loot.'

Bellin rose to his feet and faced Sir Ensor at the desk.

'I'll be able, sir, to give you a full refutation of Littlejohn's ridiculous theory at your convenience ...'

'My convenience! I want it now. Otherwise, I shall instruct Littlejohn and Cromwell to arrest you and take you away ...'

Bellin was perspiring. He closed his eyes and passed his fingers across his forehead.

'I'm not very well, sir. It must be the heat. May I have a glass of water and perhaps you wouldn't mind if the window is opened for some fresh air?'

Sir Ensor poured out a glass from a carafe on his desk and handed it to Bellin without a word. He nodded to Cromwell to open the sash window. Cromwell did so and stood by it. A gust of fresh air, sweet after the rain and the fug of the room, rushed in.

Bellin carefully placed the glass on Sir Ensor's desk and then, before any of them knew what was happening, rushed like a footballer performing a flying tackle and took a header through the open window.

The room was on the sixth floor. The three men gathered round and strained to look down the frontage.

The street lights illuminated the roadway, still shining after the rain. A small crowd had already gathered and was growing with every second. Everything seemed soundlessly done on account of the height. Cars pulling up, people running, others pushing their ways in. In an empty ring in the middle of it all, the spreadeagled, broken body of Roland Bellin.

An extract from George Bellairs'

Intruder in the Dark

THE SMALL family car descended with brake-lights flashing on and off as Mr. Cyril Savage checked his downhill flight. A corner, a little plantation of old birch trees and then the village of Plumpton Bois strewn along each side of the main road and creeping into the hillsides behind it.

‘Here we are,’ he said to his wife.

The car stopped with a shudder and they both craned their necks to see what it was like.

It was early afternoon and there didn’t seem anybody about. In front of the village pub, a large black dog was asleep with its muzzle between its outstretched forepaws. On a seat by the door, an old man was snoozing, his chin on his hands supported by the handle of a walking-stick wedged between his knees. Farther down the road, two parked old cars and an unattended lorry loaded with sacks of coal.

The inn itself was a small primitive affair with a faded sign over the door. *Miners Arms*. A name quite out of place nowadays, though not so a century ago. Plumpton Bois had then been a busy community where fortunes were being made in mining a lot of lead and a little silver. Then the lodes had run out and so had the miners and the mining companies. Rows of empty cottages had stood derelict and the larger houses of the officials had been the same. The place became a deserted village occupied only by a sprinkling of those whose roots seemed to have sunk too deeply to be moved.

Then, during the war, the great heaps of slag and rubbish and the stones and the rusty iron of the engine-houses, offices and weigh-houses of the deserted mines had been carted away for road-making and defence works, the wreckage had been covered by nature with a carpet of grass and wild flowers and somebody, finding beauty at last in the setting among the hills, had bought a decent house there for an old song and renovated it. In less than two years the village was almost fully occupied again, this time by

weekend and summer retreats of the inhabitants of nearby towns. It even attracted some commuters.

Nevertheless, it was a deserted place for much of its existence. The owners of the small houses once alive with the lusty families of the miners, now only visited them in their leisure. For the rest of the time, most of them were shut up and locked, their modern shutters closed and their gaily painted doors fastened and staring blindly on the village street.

Mr. Savage entered the inn. It smelled of alcohol and garlic. The interior somewhat belied the drab outside. Mr. Crabb, the landlord, who met the intruder in his shirt sleeves, had been slowly adapting himself to the influx of new blood and ideas in the village. There was a project in embryo for tearing down the *Miners Arms* and rebuilding it, with a swimming pool behind and a new name to match. *Plumpton Bois Auberge*. People liked that kind of thing after holidays on the Continent. They also liked foreign cooking which accounted for the prevailing aroma of garlic. Mrs. Crabb had started making meals in the evenings; French cuisine gathered from recipes in ladies' magazines.

Mr. Crabb showed no enthusiasm when he saw his visitor at that time in the afternoon. Furthermore, Savage exhibited no signs of thirst or wishing to drink. In fact, he had the look of a teetotaller. He had on his face the enquiring expression of a lost traveller.

‘Could you tell me where I can find a house called *Johnsons Place*?’

‘I’ll show you ...’

Mr. Crabb sought a cap from under the bar. He had a bald head and quickly took cold, although he persisted in his shirt sleeves.

He put on the cap and shuffled to the front door – for he was still wearing his carpet slippers – gently towing Mr. Savage along with him. They faced the view across the valley. Not a soul in sight; not a breath of wind. On that sunny day it was magnificent. A green hillside sparsely dotted with old trees and divided into small square fields with cattle feeding in them or else crops flourishing there. A stream ran in the valley between the inn and the hills.

Mr. Crabb pointed downstream to where in a patch of greenery a stone bridge crossed the water.

‘See the bridge? Cross it. It’s the first house on the left. A biggish, stone place in a fair sized garden. Used to belong to a Miss Melody Johnson who died about a month ago. Very old lady. Past eighty.’

‘Yes I know. She was my great-aunt.’

‘Oh, was she? Fancy that. Didn’t know she had any relations. None came during her last illness.’

‘I didn’t even know she was ill. In fact, I only knew she was dead when the lawyer wrote.’

Mr. Crabb gave him a reproachful look, as though, somehow, he thought Mr. Savage had been neglecting his duty.

‘I have inherited *Johnsons Place* under my great-aunt’s will. I’m on my way with my wife to see it now for the first time. This seems a nice locality.’

‘Not bad. Not bad. Live near here?’

‘No. Our home is in London. We started out early this morning and hope to be back again there late tonight. We’re just here to look over the place and then we’ll decide what to do about it.’

‘Thinking of selling? Because it should go for quite a nice figure. Since they did-up this village the value of property has gone up quite a lot. There’s been a lot of enquiries about *Johnsons Place* already. It’s commodious and in a lovely position.’

Savage made no answer, but moved towards the car where his wife sat watching his every move and even seemed to be trying to read his lips and fathom what he and the landlord were talking about.

‘Well, thank you, landlord.’

Mr. Crabb shuffled off and left the pair together again. They followed his instructions, downhill and across the bridge which carried a byway into the hills beyond. They quickly found the house.

The garden stood neglected and overgrown and as Savage gazed at it, it seemed to grow more vast and forbidding. He felt a mood of melancholy and frustration seize him. He had played with the idea of taking over the place himself if it suited him and his wife. The thought of setting to rights this wilderness filled him with despair. He was a tall, spare, middle-aged man with a long, serious face, quite devoid of humour. His looks now grew harassed and petulant at his thoughts. He turned to his wife and shrugged. Her expression was almost exactly like his own, except that she was nearer to tears.

‘Oh, dear!’

It was very hot and still and the surrounding trees and overgrown hedges oppressed the visitors almost to suffocation. The neighbourhood

seemed deserted. A few birds twittered in the bushes and in the distance someone was rushing hither and thither on a tractor.

All the blinds of the house were drawn. It stood back from the gate at the end of the worn-out path and its soiled white façade was sad-looking and desolate. An oblong structure, low lying and sprawling, with a door in the middle of the front with a window on each side of it. Three windows upstairs and a kind of glazed trap-door in the roof. A large stone doorstep, hollowed out in the middle by the feet of long-forgotten people. There was a neglected hen-run – a wire-netting enclosure with a tumbledown shed in one corner – at one end, apparently left just as it was after the poultry had been disposed of. As Savage approached, a rat ran from the shed and disappeared in the hedge.

The two intruders made their way slowly along the path. Now and then they stumbled over protruding cobblestones which bristled underfoot.

Savage paused before they reached the door. He was obviously displeased. He was disappointed with everything: the village itself, the house, the damp abandon, the smell and decay, the solitude ... the lot.

He did not complain to his wife. There seemed too much to grumble about. He was hostile to the whole set-up and was now growing hostile to his wife, as well, for suggesting the visit there, although it was necessary and had to be made sometime or other. He trudged slowly to the door and took out the key which the lawyer had given him. Then, he paused and looked back as though someone other than his companion were following him.

There was a view of the village between the trees. The scattered houses irregularly lining each side of the main road. The church tower with its rusty weathercock protruding through a thick mass of leaves. The abandoned Methodist chapel – ‘Erected to the Glory of God 1852’ – near the by-road to *Johnsons Place*. To Mr. Savage it was all depressing. He contemplated it with a strange dread, like a man condemned to exile from a beloved place inspecting his future prison.

There was a bell-push on the door jamb and for something better to do as her husband hesitated, Mrs. Savage gently tugged it. There was a creak of old wire and somewhere, far away, a ghostly bell pealed in the darkness of the house.

Mr. Savage jumped.

‘What are you doing?’ he said hoarsely as though his wife were tinkering with something dangerous.

He inserted the key in the lock and opened the door, which resisted him at first. Then a fetid draught of air surrounded the pair on the threshold. It reeked of damp stone floors, stored rotten apples and the greasy stench of neglected kitchens.

They entered hesitantly, as though afraid to disturb some waiting occupant, and found themselves plunged in cold and darkness. Mr. Savage almost ran to the window at the end of the passage and with difficulty drew up the yellow blind. A thin trickle of light spread down the long, narrow corridor from the soiled window, half obscured by an overgrowth of dead old roses and leaves from the bushes outside.

They could make out two doors to rooms on the left and right of the passage and another one to the kitchens to the right beyond. The passage was floored in old-fashioned red and cream tiles and furnished with a hatstand of bamboo, two chairs, pictures on the walls, a coconut mat on the floor. To the left at the far end, the stairs ascended.

Mr. Savage’s aunt had left him the house as it stood, furniture and all, and he was anxious to inspect his windfall. He didn’t quite know what to expect among the goods and chattels of the dead woman. He had never been here before. Admitted, Miss Melody Johnson had been his great-aunt. But she might just as well have been a stranger. She had been his grandfather’s sister and both of them had been born at *Johnsons Place* along with two other sisters and another brother, all of whom had died before his grandfather. Grandfather Johnson had left home early in life. He had never taken to mining or the life in Plumpton Bois, had quarrelled with his father, and gone to become a clerk in a tea merchant’s office in London.

Presumably his father had cut him off without a shilling and there was no account of any inheritance in Cyril Savage’s family archives. Grandfather Johnson had never got on with his sister Melody either.

Cyril Savage had met his Aunt Melody once when he was a child. She had been in London on business and had called on his father and mother, her sole remaining relatives. She hadn’t taken on Cyril at all, nor he to her. And she had disapproved of the rest of the family, too; Cyril’s sister, since dead, and his brother, who had later gone downhill to the dogs. Miss Johnson had been too starchy and exacting altogether the visit had been a failure and she had said farewell and departed for good. The family had

broken up later and Aunt Melody had grown into a distant memory, a sort of ghost from the past.

Cyril was a bank cashier in London and was keen on money. He had made several attempts to re-establish contact with his great-aunt, with an eye to ingratiating himself with her. After all, the Johnsons had been reputed to be very comfortably off. They had owned a very profitable mine in Plumpton Bois when the lodes were flourishing. His mother's great-grandfather had, he knew, started a mine of his own, raised himself from a modest miner to a local bigwig, built *Johnson's Place*, and moved to it from a two-up and two-down cottage. But all Cyril's approaches to his aunt had been repulsed. She had snubbed him, never answered his letters or his persistent Christmas cards.

Once only, when he had written to say that he would be in the vicinity on holidays and would call on her, had she sent him a formal note. 'Miss Johnson is unwell and is unable to receive visitors.' After that, he'd given up.

And now, like a bolt from the blue, the legacy. A house and its contents. And what a house! Large, damp, rambling and shabby.

When Mr. Jeremiah Cunliffe, his aunt's lawyer in Povington, had written to him and explained that Miss Johnson wished the house and all its contents to pass to her sole surviving relative, Cyril Savage had pictured a fine patrician place. He was due to retire from the bank in four years and maybe he could then settle there, his mother's family home. But now ... Not on your life ...

'You'd better call and see the place and then come back to me and let me know what you decide to do about it,' Mr. Cunliffe had told him when Savage had called on his way to inspect his windfall. 'You may find it somewhat neglected. Of late years your aunt has not been at all well and unable to manage her affairs properly. Had I not done my modest share of keeping an eye on things, they might have been far worse ...'

Mr. Savage had grown bold.

'Who inherits the money, if I'm only to get the property?'

Mr. Cunliffe was a small, aged, wiry man with close-cut sandy hair, sandy eyebrows and a benevolent expression for the occasion. His benevolence turned to acid at the question.

'There was very little left. A few hundred pounds in the bank. No investments and, as far as I can ascertain, no property elsewhere. You are

the only one to receive any substantial benefit.'

'Who gets the bank balance?'

Mr. Savage was a persistent man. Mr. Cunliffe regarded him bellicosely over his spectacles.

'I do. She and I had been friends for more than sixty years and during that time, I helped her with all her financial affairs. After her legacy to you, she left me the residue. It was in the nature of a mere honorarium, for I collected very little from her in the way of fees during her lifetime. Are you satisfied, or shall I read the will to you? It is quite short.'

Mr. Savage decided that he'd been swindled by a sharp lawyer and that it was no use arguing about it.

'You needn't bother. I see your point.'

'The house and grounds of *Johnsons Place* have been neglected of late. Miss Johnson's maid, a woman of over seventy, who'd been with her since she was a girl taken from an orphanage, and nursed your aunt through her last illness, left about a week ago. I would have urged her to stay until you took over, but she had made other arrangements. So, as I couldn't find a suitable caretaker in the vicinity, I had to leave things. A neighbour is keeping an eye on the place, however. I'm sorry, but I did my best. You see, Plumpton Bois was, until quite recently, an almost deserted village. There are very few domestic workers there, if any. The owners of the properties are either elderly retired people, or else residents from nearby towns who come and go over weekends ...'

Mr. Savage had left the lawyer feeling very unhappy and dissatisfied. He had a presentiment that somewhere, something was wrong ...

The whole interview came back to him as he stood before the door of the room on the left of the tiled passage. He turned the knob, but the door didn't move. He put his knee to it and irritably banged it open. When he stepped inside, he recoiled.

This was what must have been a ceremonial sitting-room. It smelled of damp horsehair and decayed curtains. There were stiff little chairs, a brass fender before the fireplace and a skin hearthrug which looked to be suffering from ringworm. A small Sheraton desk in one corner was the only article of furniture worth looking at. The walls and mantelpiece were littered with framed and fading photographs of the Johnson family. Mr. Savage recoiled from none of these, but from the state of the room.

A large mahogany chiffonier had all its drawers out and had been resolutely rummaged. The desk had suffered the same indignity and its locks had been forced. As though seeking a hiding place under the floor, the intruder had partly rolled back the carpet, a worn green affair, and apparently examined the boards under it. He had even been up the chimney, for there were marks of soot here and there in the room, as though he hadn't minded his dirty hands or gloves.

This was the last straw for Mr. Savage. He made whimpering noises as he paused to recover from the shock and then, ignoring his wife, rushed from room to room, upstairs and down. Without exception, they had suffered a similar going-over, but order had apparently been somewhat restored there. As though the searcher – whoever he was – had originally tried to make a neat job, but that his time had run out as he progressed.

The mattresses and feather beds in the two furnished bedrooms had been opened and plumbed and there were feathers scattered all over the place like relics of a destructive fox in a poultry yard.

Cyril Savage was almost hysterical with rage and confusion until intense hatred of the unknown intruder steadied him. Meanwhile, his wife, infected by the crazy atmosphere created by her husband, had collapsed in an armchair in the dining-room, Miss Johnson's living place, with a round oak table, straw bottomed chairs and a large Welsh dresser with its drawers gaping wide.

Savage didn't even bother about his wife. He continued to rush here and there, like a caged rat seeking an outlet. Upstairs and down, to the attics and back. He was not a courageous man, but very impulsive. That was the reason he hadn't got very far in the bank. He'd made a lot of stupid mistakes during his career, charging like a bull at a gate when faced by a problem. He would have killed the wrecker of his aunt's house had he found him. That would have been another mistake.

Finally, the only place he found unexplored was the cavity under the stairs, close by a large door, which presumably gave access to the cellars. When Savage tried to open it he found it locked. There was no key. He sought everywhere for it, his anger re-kindled. He was a sorry sight. His face streaked with soot, his eyes staring, his lips twisted in a mirthless grin. He still wore his cap and raincoat; the former askew over one eye, the latter stained with dust, oil and soot picked up during his wild search. He could

not find the key anywhere. He put his shoulder to the obstinate door, but it resisted him. He kicked it, but it did not move.

At last, in a transport of rage, he took up a heavy hall chair and smashed at the lock. The door opened suddenly from the weight of the blow.

Mr. Savage paused as though surprised at what he had accomplished. He felt the clammy tainted air ooze from the black yawning cavity and surround him, rancid and full of decay. That was all.

When Mrs. Savage came-to a little later, she sat upright and listened. Not a sound indoors. She screamed her husband's name which echoed round the empty house. There was no reply. She slowly made her way to the hall, gripping the furniture to hold her up and give her some confidence.

She found her husband dead at the top of the cellar steps from a fearful blow on the head. She gave a great moan and, in a burst of terrified strength, ran screaming from the place.

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George Bellairs was the pseudonym of Harold Blundell (1902-1985). He was, by day, a Manchester bank manager with close connections to the University of Manchester. He is often referred to as the English Simenon, as his detective stories combine wicked crimes and classic police procedurals, set in small British communities.

He was born in Lancashire and married Gladys Mabel Roberts in 1930. He was a Francophile which explains why many of his titles took place in France. Bellairs travelled there many times, and often wrote articles for English newspapers and magazines, with news and views from France.

After retiring from business, he moved with Gladys to Colby on the Isle of Man, where they had many friends and family. Some of his detective novels are set on the Isle of Man and his surviving notebooks attest to a keen interest in the history, geography and folklore of the island. In 1941 he wrote his first mystery story during spare moments at his air raid warden's post. Throughout the 1950s he contributed a regular column to the *Manchester Guardian* under the pseudonym George Bellairs, and worked as a freelance writer for other newspapers both local and national.

Blundell's first mystery, *Littlejohn on Leave* (1941) introduced his series detective, Detective Inspector Thomas Littlejohn. His books are strong in characters and small communities – set in the 1940s to '70s. The books have strong plots, and are full of scandal and intrigue. His series character started as Inspector and later became Superintendent Thomas Littlejohn. Littlejohn, reminiscent of Inspector Maigret, is injected with humour, intelligence and compassion.

He died on the Isle of Man in April 1982 just before his eightieth birthday after a protracted illness.

If you'd like to hear more from George Bellairs and other classic crime writers, follow [@CrimeClassics](#) on Twitter or connect with them on [Facebook](#).

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